



What Safe Jobs We Have?

by Janet L. Keyes, CIH

At 3:00 P.M. on February 26, 2015, two employees for True Colors Custom Auto Touch Up in Maryland were performing minor auto body repair and painting in the parking lot of a used car sales establishment. Employee #1 was wearing a half-facepiece elastomeric respirator equipped with combination organic vapor/N95 pre-filter cartridges and was applying an isocyanate-containing clear coat finish to a car bumper, when he suffered an asthma attack. The employee had a history of asthma and asked a coworker to get his nebulizer. The coworker was preparing the treatment when Employee #1 collapsed. He stopped breathing and was transported to a local hospital where he died two days later.

At 2:30 p.m. on December 18, 2018, an employee of Main Street Automotive Services in Pennsylvania was lying underneath an extended Ford Econoline Van and attempting to start the engine of a disabled vehicle. The employee was run over by the vehicle when it started and rolled forward. He was killed.

I didn't make those up. They are word for word from OSHA's fatality/catastrophe records. They aren't unique.

How could the first death have been prevented? If the employee had been medically screened for respirator use, his doctor may not have cleared him to use this type of respirator, given his asthma. If he had been fit-tested to ensure the respirator fit him, if he had been trained on safe use, if he had been taught that the clear coat could trigger asthma, maybe he'd still be alive.

What about the second? Lockout: block the car so it could not move.

But those won't happen at *your* shop. Nothing ever goes wrong there. No one gets really injured. Sure, you've had employees report particles in the eyes and the occasional cut, but that's routine.

Over 200 automotive repair shops in the U.S. learned otherwise in the last four years. They had injuries so severe that their employees were hospitalized or lost digits. Those lost body parts were usually fingers – but in 2015, an employee at FinishMaster in Texas lost toes when a drum slid from a platform onto her foot.

Some lessons from these:

- OSHA standards exist because of hard-learned experience. How do I know the painter wasn't trained, hadn't been medically approved, and hadn't had fit-testing to verify his respirator would actually protect him? That's what OSHA cited the company for. The penalty was \$5150, not much compared to the price of a life. If the shop had followed OSHA regs, it would still have a painter and wouldn't have that blot on its record. Don't

follow the OSHA standards because you're afraid of OSHA. Follow them because they save lives and limbs.

- Control energy. Expect cars to roll forward or to start up when you don't expect them to. Remove keys and block wheels.
- Lift vehicles with caution. Make sure they are securely balanced. At least eleven people were hospitalized because jacks shifted or equipment sitting on jacks or lifts slipped off.
- Insist on good housekeeping and equipment in good condition. Serious injuries were caused by such mundane items as being tangled in the rope used to open a garage door and an opening in the floor.
- Label chemicals. And never ever allow food containers to be used for chemicals. An employee in Ohio was hospitalized after drinking from a Gatorade bottle, repurposed to store floor cleaner. The company paid for the medical costs and lost time (through Workers' Comp), and paid a \$4000 penalty to OSHA.

Don't assume that that people know how to work safely. Common sense isn't common – it's wisdom accumulated from experience and observation. Provide training and provide a good example. You don't want to have to explain to OSHA why an employee fractured bones. And you don't want to explain to an employee's family why he won't be coming home anymore.



This article is intended to provide general information (no advice) about current safety topics. To discuss your specific concerns and how CHESS may help, please contact CHESS at 651-481-9787 or chess@chess-safety.com

This article originally appeared in *AASP News* (July 2019).