



SAFETY ALERT

Chemical Exposure Incident

RISK MANAGEMENT & SAFETY

Date: October, 2018
Category: Kitchen Safety
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Description

An employee was cleaning pans covered with spices from food preparation. To assist in cleaning the cookware, the employee free poured too much detergent into two sinks filled with hot water. This resulted in the chemicals becoming airborne by steam/mist. The building was evacuated as a precaution. Fourteen employees experienced symptoms of chemical exposure and were evaluated at the Wellness Center and released to return to work. Two employees were prescribed medication.

Findings

- The employee acknowledged free pouring detergent instead of waiting for dispenser to reset after re-filling it.
- Free pouring is a practice used in the past and is still being used.
- The concentration of the free poured chemical in the sinks was too high.
- An empty container of chemical was found in the trash and another half full bottle next to the nearest sink.
- All employees had been trained on the proper use of the chemicals.
- Odors similar to the one during the incident have been present in the work area in the past but during this instance were more pungent.

Root Causes

- Supervisors unaware that free pouring was taking place.
- The process for supervision to review the pot & pan room is not broad enough to ensure chemicals are handled properly.
- The detergent dispenser was able to be bypassed and employees have access to chemical storage.
- Employee free poured chemicals to take a shortcut.

Actions

- Establish controls over the chemical storage area and dispensers to prevent bypassing.
- Ensure supervisors are verifying pot and pan room safety during each shift.
- Review and revise job hazard analysis of wash room process and implement corrections as necessary.
- Conduct safety review with area staff reviewing this incident and importance & consequences of not following procedures.
- Communicate & implement learning across department as appropriate.

All safety communications can be found at <https://riskmanagement.nd.edu/communication/safety-communication/>.

Document #: 18-0009