

Storage and Disposal Mistakes May Be Hazardous to Your Job

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by Jeffrey Doucette

Changes in laws and procedures governing the safe storage and disposal of hazardous materials directly affect ice arena operations and, in some cases, our bottom line. Besides running the risk of possible litigation for safety violations, you pay insurance premiums based, in part, on these changes and on your safety record.

A sound working knowledge of the materials in your facility is vital. Customer and employee safety, insurance costs, environmental responsibility and OSHA compliance should all be top priorities in any ice arena. You must understand which materials you have and which ones are considered hazardous, as well as how to handle, contain, use and dispose of each of these items.

Lock ‘em up, don’t mix ‘em up

It sounds obvious, but it bears repeating: You must never store any type of hazardous material in a manner that allows even a remote possibility of customer access. Let’s face it, not all parents watch their kids when they are in our buildings. Children have ways of surprising us by getting into places and things that, we were convinced, were secure. A securely locked room or cabinet will keep curious fingers out.

Mixing dissimilar materials in the same area can be as dangerous as an unlocked cabinet. Do not store cleaning supplies in the same area where you store food products. Many of us have snack bars in our facilities and they must be kept clean, but that does not mean the cleaners may be stored in the same area. Store them in a completely separate area, or at least in a separate, clearly labeled cabinet. A red cleaning solution can look just like cherry-flavored syrup, but it sure will not taste the same nor have the same result if ingested.

Know your stuff

How often do you lose a hydraulic hose on your ice resurfacing machine? When it happens, you might lose up to 15 or 20 gallons of the fluid before it can be repaired. And what happens to the fluid?

If you use glycol in your refrigeration system under the floor and there is a break in one of the pipes, unless you’re set up for it, the circulating pumps do not shut off and some 400 gallons of the mix can be pumped right out of the system. Where does all that glycol go?

After you are finished painting the hockey nets or tuning up the resurfer or compressors, what do you do with the paintbrush or the paintbrush cleaner, or the used oil and the greasy rags you used during your well-intended tune up?

If your answer to any of these scenarios is to let it go down the drain or throw it in the trash, then OSHA and the EPA want to talk to you! And by the way, lawsuits and fines resulting from improper hazardous waste disposal are not covered by your insurance policy.

It is in your best interest to fully understand the materials in your facility, and how to handle them.

Material Safety Data Sheets are a good source of information, but I doubt anyone has an MSDS for oil-based paints or bug spray.

Here is short list of materials that should be handled and disposed of properly: fluorescent bulbs, lighting ballasts, manual thermostats, (contain mercury), computer equipment, (circuit boards contain lead), aerosol cans, (contain propellants and unused material), empty motor oil containers, printer cartridges, empty grease tubes, oil or grease clean-up rags, any type of soaking blankets for petroleum spills, dead machine batteries, battery acid, flashlight batteries, insecticides, ice-melt products, bathroom cleaning materials and their empty containers, televisions, air conditioners, lawn mowers, edger engines, hydraulic pumps and resurfacing machine engines.

The list can go on and on. The cleaning chemicals we use in our facilities alone make up a lengthy list.

Cost vs. benefits

Waiting until something happens is the wrong approach to storage and disposal practices. Being proactive is the key.

Resources are more easily accessible for government-owned facilities than for private ones. Privately owned facilities need to be aggressive to get to the sources and information that state or municipal facilities have at their disposal. A visit to the EPA or OSHA Web site, or your state OSHA Web site, is a start (23 states have their own OSHA department).

Safety supply stores can provide you with containers and soaking materials as well as personal safety equipment. Some may even be able to help you decide which of your materials need special handling.

It takes time and effort to fully understand the rules of compliance. But as publicly used facilities, we are subject to the same scrutiny as manufacturing or chemical plants, and one difference between “them” and “us” is that we often operate on a shoestring budget, with no wiggle room for costly errors. And while it’s true that proper disposal sometimes has its own costs attached, it’s small in comparison to the potential fine.

There are other benefits to good safety practices besides simply avoiding fines. Knowing that you are demonstrating environmental responsibility feels pretty good, too.

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