



SAFETY ALERT

Lessons for Safe Chemical Handling

WHAT HAPPENED?

A farm worker left hydrochloric acid in a knapsack, which was left in an enclosed chemical store room for several days. Other farm workers were unaware it was there. It was not labelled. Other farm workers noticed a bad smell coming from the storeroom, so they entered this room without PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) and found a toxic yellow plume and spill on the floor. At this time they were unaware of the content held in the knapsack. The substance had leaked on to the floor after perishing the rubber seals and reacted with other chemicals residue on the floor. Fire & Emergency (FENZ) were called to clean up the spill. The four farm workers who had been exposed to the plume were taken to the nearest medical centre. Medical staff were delayed in the treatment of employees due to the unknown contents and poor label identification of the substance.

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

Key lessons:

1. Only use hazardous substances for their intended purpose.
2. When decanting hazardous substances make sure the true label is affixed to the next container. A generic description may not always be true.
3. Ensure correct Safety Data Sheets are readily available for substances held and used.
4. Ensure substances are stored in the correct hazardous substances location as per Safety Data Sheet requirements.
5. Following a spill, ensure PPE is used, secure the area and follow emergency processes.
6. Be aware of the risks. Make sure all staff have a basic understanding of the dangers of chemicals, and only staff appropriately trained have access and handle chemicals.
7. Always wear PPE.
8. Never be complacent when working with chemicals.

