

Safetyline 103

H & S UPDATE JULY 2009

Kent University have reported a fire caused by the **moulded plug on a vacuum cleaner overheating** and bursting into flames. Two similar incidents have occurred involving the same type of cleaner, a Victor Hepa V9. The overheating has been attributable to poor connections between live terminals and fuse holders in the plug assemblies. Unfortunately using RCDs or PAT testing are unlikely to address or identify this problem. Kent University are liaising with the manufacturers to confirm the latent defect has been corrected.

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*Shell International has been fined £300,000 after two fires in 2006 at the Shell Centre in central London highlighted fire safety deficiencies. London Fire Brigade inspections found that the company had several fire safety breaches, including blocked escape routes and fire exits, defective fire doors and excessive fire loading. The deficiencies were so severe the London Fire Brigade served a prohibition notice on Shell which restricted the use of parts of the building.*

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A long running trade union campaign to introduce **safer needles and prevent sharps injuries** to health workers reached a successful conclusion recently with the agreement of strict European Union guidelines. Sharps and needlestick injuries in the NHS are estimated to affect as many as 100,000 workers a year. The framework agreement aims to prevent the incidence of injuries with contaminated sharps, protect the workers at risk and establish appropriate response and follow up policies in cases where injuries occur. The Department of Health is being urged to take the initiative and start using safer needles and adopting the new prevention guidelines across the UK prior to the introduction of EU legislation, which is expected later in 2009.

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*We have reorganised some of the information in the Guidance section of our website and have created a new list titled "**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**". In the item "Selection and Use of Gloves" we now have a grey box on the right hand side which links to an HSE website which has a video showing how to remove contaminated gloves without contaminating the other hand while doing so. There are also charts indicating "Breakthrough and Permeation" information for gloves of different types to help you ensure that you have the right type of gloves for the substances with which you work.*

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You may have noticed adverts or received letters stating that HSE have introduced new versions of its **health and safety poster** and that it should be a fixture in every workplace in Britain. What these don't say is that employers have the right to provide each worker with a copy of an HSE leaflet outlining health and safety law as an alternative to putting up the posters, and it is fact the leaflet option that this University has followed for many years; as such there is no requirement for posters to be placed inside workplaces here. Many of these adverts also fail to state that where posters are used, that the current "old-style" posters are still valid until 5th April 2014.

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*We have recently been informed by the Chemical Weapons Authority (UK National Authority) of a ban **on the import and export of Schedule 1,2 & 3 Chemicals** to and from the following countries Angola, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Israel, Myanmar, Somalia, Syria and Taiwan. For further details, please contact Anne Willcox (A.Willcox@Sheffield.ac.uk).*

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During hot weather you may think about **wearing sandals or flip-flops** to work to help stay cool. Although health and safety law doesn't ban flip-flops, slips, trips and falls do account for about 30% of all workplace accidents, and what you wear on your feet makes a big difference. So if you work somewhere where the floor can't be kept dry or clean, then wearing shoes that fit well and have a good grip would be a better choice than flip-flops. If the work you do has been risk assessed and requires specific foot protection, you must comply with the requirement of that assessment. Similarly, flip-flops are not suitable for laboratory work.