A Guide to Car Wash Safety

INTRODUCTION

Workers in car wash operations encounter many hazards on the job each day. The following information and suggestions will assist in safeguarding workers against injuries and illnesses during car wash operations.

Car wash operations vary. Some common activities, that if not performed safely, can put workers at risk for injury. Workers are to be aware of their surroundings and the possible hazards that may be present.

In general, there are three types of car wash operations:

- A self-service station which allows customers to wash and dry their cars.
- A conveyor operated station, whereby the car moves through a tunnel and is cleaned with spinning brushes or high-pressure nozzles. Additional services may also include: interior cleaning and vacuuming of carpeting or mats and external waxing and buffing/polishing.
- An in-bay automatic station that is typically located at gas stations.

SLIPS, TRIPS, AND FALLS

Slips, trips, and falls account for most injuries in car wash operations and can result in minor to severe cuts and bruises, sprains or strains, and fractures or concussions. Slip hazards are increased when hastily performing activities while walking on surfaces that are wet from water, soaps, oil and polishing agents. Supplies and work tools that are scattered in and around the work area increases risks.

To reduce the chance of an injury, workers should:

- Wear slip resistant shoes.
- Walk, not run, on damp and wet surfaces.
- Practice good housekeeping.
- Use proper ladders or step stools to reach high profile vehicles.

Suggested work practices to prevent slips, trips, and falls include having employees:

- Work at a steady pace.

- Use caution when walking through the work area.
- Keep walking surfaces clean to prevent build up of wax, oil, debris, and other cleaning products.
- Keep hoses coiled, and buckets, rags, and tools in designated areas and not in walkways.
- Clean up all spills, detergents, and cleaning agents immediately.

SPRAINS AND STRAINS

Car wash activities can involve awkward postures such as over reaching, bending, kneeling, and repetitive motions (e.g., buffing of vehicles). To reduce the risk of a strain, sprain, or repetitive motion injury (RMI), encourage workers to employ good ergonomic practices as:

- Performing simple stretches before, during, and after work.
- Not over reaching to perform tasks and avoid using awkward postures.
- Using a stepladder for high profile vehicles to raise the worker to the level of activity.
- Using long handled tools or tool extenders for hard-to- reach areas.
- Not bending over (flexion) by squatting down or sitting on a stool to lower the worker to the level of activity or by placing one knee on a padded surface, one hand on the vehicle, and slightly raising one leg to take the weight off the back.
- Using proper lifting techniques or material handling aids to move a heavy load.
- Not twisting or turning your body while lifting or carrying a load.

CHEMICAL EXPOSURES

Chemicals containing products such as detergents, waxes, polishes, and solvents can present a hazardous exposure. A chemical’s manufacturer or importer provides a Safety Data Sheet (SDS), which describes the product’s chemical makeup, recommended usage, handling, storage, personal protective equipment, first aid procedures, and other information as required by the Hazard Communication Program requirements.

Suggestions for safe handling of chemical containing products include having employees:

- Read and follow directions on the label or SDS before using a new product.
- Use, store, and dispose of product as recommended on label/SDS.
- Wear recommended Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Wash hands after using the product and before eating, drinking or smoking.
- Keep the product away from eyes, nose, or mouth (ingestion).
- Immediately notify supervisor of hazardous exposure.
- Follow first aid procedures as directed.
- Prohibit smoking or open flame near flammable product or where explosive vapors may be present.

ELECTRICAL HAZARDS

Car wash activities often require the use of electrically driven tools and machinery near areas where water may be present. Workers should fully understand the dangerous consequences, which can result from this potentially hazardous combination. Warning signs should be placed in all areas of electrically

operated machinery and equipment.

Safety suggestions to prevent hazardous electrical exposures:

- Only trained and authorized workers should use/ operate electric tools or equipment.
- Never use electrical tools or equipment in damp or wet areas, unless the tool is specifically designed for such use.
- Workers should never touch or operate electrical equipment when hands are wet or when standing on wet surfaces.
- Workers should stand on a nonconductive mat or platform when handling electrical tools or while touching machinery.
- Prevent body contact with grounded surfaces such as pipes, blowers, or machinery.
- Before activation or contact, tools and equipment should be checked for “point-of-use” ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCI)
- Damaged tools or cords with splices or exposed wires should be tagged for repair and removed from use.
- Workers should not perform repairs unless qualified or authorized to do so.
- Encourage workers to report unsafe conditions to supervisors.

Every car wash operation should have a written, site specific safety program in place, which explains potential hazards and exposures to workers. This program should include the following:

- Specific safety training and instruction in all safety procedures.
- Periodic refresher training.
- The inspection of equipment on a regular basis.
- Recommended preventive and corrective maintenance procedures.
- Workers should immediately report unsafe conditions to their supervisor.

VEHICLE MOVEMENT

In car wash operations, there is a lot of activity from vehicles entering and exiting the premises, car wash areas, and detail/ finishing locations.

The way to assure that workers and customers remain safe during vehicle movement is to assign a key member of the management team the responsibility and authority to set and enforce comprehensive driver safety policies. This includes making sure those assigned to drive on the job have a valid driver’s license that’s appropriate for the type of vehicle to be driven.

Suggested vehicle safety practices include:

- Only trained and licensed drivers should operate vehicles.
- Post and enforce speed restrictions on site.
- Stand clear of a moving vehicle when guiding them off the conveyor.
- Before driving forward/backward, conduct a physical and visual check around vehicle to assure personal clearance.
- Fully stop and engage parking brake, before exiting a vehicle.
- Horseplay of any kind should not be tolerated or allowed when operating a vehicle.

MACHINERY/EQUIPMENT EXPOSURES

Car wash operations have many activities going on at the same time with workers, customers, machinery, and vehicles in motion throughout the site. Instruct workers to stay alert in areas of moving machinery/equipment. When equipment is in need of maintenance or repair, a procedure should be in place to prevent an accidental start up or involuntary movement of machinery/equipment. Train workers in lockout/ blockout procedures and make sure all workers know the location of emergency “off” switches for conveyors and moving machinery/equipment.

Suggestions for personal safety around moving machinery/equipment:

- Only trained and authorized workers should operate machinery/equipment.
- Before machine/equipment activation, read all instructions in the operating manual.
- Before use, check machine/equipment for good condition and guards in place.
- Follow standard procedures to operate and halt machinery/equipment.
- Consistently practice and enforce lockout/ blockout procedures.

HEAT EXPOSURES

Heat sources may be a risk factor in some car wash operations. Heated pressure tanks containing steam and hoses spraying hot water could result in serious burns if safety precautions are not followed. Warning signs should be posted in areas where high heat temperatures could be encountered. Heated environmental conditions such as enclosed wash areas or outdoor weather conditions on hot days can lead to heat illness unless workers take proper safety precaution.