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Date Issued: June 27, 2008

INCIDENT ALERT

A laborer was tasked with hot water pressure washing the side of a building. A scaffold had been erected to perform the work. The laborer had completed washing the building on the third level of the scaffolding and was moving his equipment to the next lower level to continue the task. He had lowered his pressure washing wand (commonly called a gun) through the scaffold access hatch and began descending the ladder. The wand got in his way and he reached back to move it. As he grasped the valve actuator (trigger) he unintentionally depressed it and was struck by a hot, pressurized stream of water on his back. He reported the injury to his supervisor, who transported him to a nearby emergency room for treatment. Medical personnel applied antibiotic cream, bandaged the injury, and he was allowed to return to work.

LESSONS LEARNED

Several issues were identified during the incident investigation. First, the worker had lowered the hot water spray gun through the personnel access hatch. It was identified that a better practice would be to lower the gun to the next level by using a tag line attached to the outside of the scaffolding. This way the hose or the gun would not interfere with moving up or down through the access hatch. Second, the worker was alone at his work station. Supervision felt it would be better to have two workers in the same area. This would allow one to assist the other with moving equipment. Third, though the wand was equipped with a safety lever that would block the trigger from unintentional actuation, it was not in use. A decision was made that the safety lever would be placed in the “safe” position whenever the wand was not in use.

A task plan had been developed for the activity but did not include a best practice for moving the wand from one level to another. This has been corrected.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Review your project to determine if pressure washing is part of the project scope. If so, talk with your contractor about how they will manage the activity, and what their expectations are for safety plan development and management by the pressure washing contractor. Ask if they have identified the hazards and what actions will be taken to assure work is completed injury free.

2. Talk with the workers performing pressure washing activities. Ask them about the hazards and find out what efforts are being made to keep them safe. Ask if they can think of things that can be improved.

3. Share this Incident Alert with your contractor and ask them to share it with their workers.

Distribution:
All CPO Staff