

Car Wash Safety

According to the International Car Wash Association, there are over 100,000 car washes in North America employing about 625,000 people.

Serious injuries can occur in car wash operations such as electrocutions, chemical burns, lacerations, amputations, strains, struck-by moving vehicles, assaults and slips and falls.

However, there are many precautions that can be taken to eliminate or significantly reduce such injuries.

A written site specific safety program should be developed and implemented. This program should have instructions and procedures that are task-specific for employees to follow.

Specific safety training should be provided to all employees. The training should include new hire orientation, specific on-the-job training, and periodic refresher training.

Employees should be instructed to inspect equipment regularly and report any unsafe conditions to their supervisors immediately.

A preventive and corrective maintenance program should also be in place to assure that all equipment is in good condition.

TYPES OF CAR WASHES

There are three types of car washes: Conveyor, In-Bay Automatic, and Self-Service.

In full service conveyor car washes a conveyor belt catches the vehicle's wheel, pulling the automobile through the tunnel to clean it with the use of spinning brushes (friction) or high-pressure nozzles (frictionless). These types of car washes usually include interior cleaning. Detailing services such as waxing, polishing and vacuuming are also offered at full-service car washes.

In-bay automatic car washes are mostly found at gas stations. The driver pulls into the bay and parks the vehicle, which remains stationary while a machine moves back and forth over the vehicle to clean it.

In self-service car washes, the customers wash cars themselves. Employee injury exposures at these types of car washes are lower since employees are only responsible for cleaning the area.

Conveyor and In-Bay Automatic car washes have higher accident exposures from equipment operations.

Full service car washes offer detailing services which include the cleaning of carpets and floor mats using shampoo and deodorants. The exterior is hand washed and buffed to remove scratches. A wax and/or polish follows the buffing procedure, if necessary. Detailing brings additional accident exposures such as chemical burns, eye injuries and accidents caused by the improper use of powered hand tools

GENERAL SAFETY RULES

The following are some general rules for car washes:

Electrical Hazards

To reduce the possibility of severe injury or death from electrical shock, employees should not conduct any repairs unless they are qualified and authorized by the company. Lockout/tagout procedures should be followed when servicing or maintaining equipment.

The Experienced
Workers'
Compensation
Specialist

The following precautions should be followed when using portable/power tools:

- Ensure all electrical tools have double insulation. Do not use a tool that does not have a ground prong.
- Install "point-of-use" ground fault interrupter (GFI) electrical receptacles for use in all tunnel and bay areas.
- Do not use tools or extension cords that have splices or exposed wires.
- Do not handle or operate electrical equipment when hands are wet or when standing on wet floors.

CHEMICAL HAZARDS

Caution should be exercised in handling all chemical products. Some car wash chemicals are caustic and should not come in direct contact with bare skin or eyes.

Read caution labels on any chemical products. Read and understand the MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheet) for each chemical product used. These sheets provide important information regarding safe use, personal protective equipment, storage and first aid. Follow the company Hazard Communication Program.

CONVEYOR AND SPINNING BRUSHES

Employees should receive instructions on the safe use of equipment. Never touch conveyor or spinning brushes when they are in operation. Severe injuries can occur if a hose held by an employee gets caught in running conveyor belts or spinning brushes.

Employees should not enter the car wash tunnel area while car wash equipment is running. When entry is required, all car wash equipment should be turned off and locked out. Signs should be in place to restrict other vehicles from entering the tunnel area.

Whenever a car wash "EMERGENCY STOP" button is pushed, it is to be reset ONLY by the person who initially stopped the equipment after the emergency has been addressed.

Consider the installation of systems that have safety features such as torque-limited brushes and vehicle-activated pressure plates.

STRAINS

When performing manual lifting tasks, obtain solid footing. Stand close, bend your knees and keep your back straight. Lift straight up, push with your legs. Hold the load close to your body. Avoid twisting or turning your body while lifting or carrying a load. Turn feet to change body position.

If the object is too heavy for you, get someone to help you. Use proper material handling aids such as hand trucks, carts, etc.

When pushing a car manually, always get help. Consider using a power pusher.

VEHICULAR TRAFFIC TIPS

- Post and enforce speed restrictions on the property to reduce accident probability.
- Drive-on and drive-off employees should have a valid driver's license with appropriate training.
- Never stand in front of the car when guiding it on to the conveyor, or once it's moving.
- Be sure that the vehicle is fully stopped and the transmission is in "Park" or "Neutral" and the parking brake is engaged, before allowing anyone to get out of the vehicle.
- Car wash employees should never drive a vehicle with a door open or their leg or foot outside the vehicle.

- When exiting the tunnel, make sure the area is clear and proceed slowly.

ASSAULTS

Actions that should be implemented to prevent assaults and robberies may include:

- Provide adequate lighting both inside and outside the premises.
- Install security surveillance cameras.
- Post signs notifying the public that limited cash is kept on the premises.
- Implement a Preventing Violence in the Workplace program.

SLIPS AND FALLS

Good housekeeping is essential to a safe workplace and may result in fewer accidents and reduced fire hazards.

Remove tools, materials or other objects lying on floors, driveways, and work areas. Clean up all spills such as oil, detergent, wax, etc. Drain trenches must be kept clean to minimize the amount of excess water on the floor. Employees should wear slip-resistant shoes. Employees should receive training in correct ladder selection, inspection and safe use.

For further information or assistance, contact your Zenith Safety and Health Consultant.