



Near Miss!



Date: April 11, 2023

Activity: Confined Space Hazard

What Happened:

During summer of 2022 a worker went to an outside storage container (an ISO or intermodal container with standard doors) to get some cases of water for a break area. On opening the door, he immediately noted that there was a very strong, sweet odor somewhat like acetone.

Having been trained in confined space entry, the worker left the door open and went to get his supervisor. They returned and the supervisor opened the doors with the worker to vent the container. After a few minutes, they entered the container and found that someone had left an open container of MEK (methyl ethyl ketone, also known as butanone) in the container along with some other equipment and cleaning gear.

Why it Happened:

- A container of hazardous fluid was left open and not properly sealed.
- It was left in the wrong container, which was designated for water and beverages only.
- The summer heat caused the MEK to evaporate and fill the closed container with vapor.

Typical Hazards:

- Neurological damage, headache, dizziness, loss of memory, tremors, gait ataxia, dementia
- Respiratory distress or respiratory depression, convulsions, coma

Corrective Action:

A special safety meeting was conducted that evening. All hands were retrained in proper chemical storage and confined space entry practices were reviewed. The container was placed under lock to prevent future occurrences.

