Dress for the Occasion

Proud of his 10 year accident free driving history, Reggie was a dedicated and mature driver for a regional hazmat transporter. He was respected by his peers and trusted by his employer. Sadly, late on a Friday afternoon last July he was injured. It seems that Reggie was asked to make “one more delivery” that had not been forecasted. His dedication made him say YES, but in the back of his mind he was calculating the time it would take and if he would make it home in time to see his son play in a baseball game. He convinced himself that it could be done if he hurried – and that is exactly what he did. Reggie did not put on the entire chemical personal protective equipment that he had routinely used for years. Instead, he just put on the gloves, pant and boots. Forget the jacket he thought, I don’t need it.

His decision proved to be unwise. Reggie was quickly disconnecting the hose from the rear of his trailer when a significant amount of corrosive chemical spewed out. It splashed on his chest and then flowed down his abdomen inside the chemical pants that he was wearing. This aggravated the situation because it was contained against his skin.

LIFE LESSON

Reggie’s injuries were unusual for a truck driver – chemical burns to his lower torso. These types of injuries also have an unusual progression. They take longer to heal and there is a high risk of infection, which can greatly complicate the successful outcome of medical treatment and recovery. Fortunately for Reggie his outcome was not as severe as it could have been, but he still endured a painful experience that could have easily been avoided. And what made his injury experience even more painful was the fact that he knew better than to do what he did. During his recovery Reggie reflected on the event and considered what advice he would provide others who transport bulk hazmat so they will not have to “feel the pain.” He came up with two recommendations:

1) Always wear the provided chemical personal protective equipment. They give it to you for a reason, and it is not to hassle you or make you uncomfortable. It is provided to protect you from the chemical hazards. Even though you may have never experienced the physical damage that chemical exposure can cause, trust that the PPE serves a purpose.

2) Remain aware of the “current conditions.” The temptation to take short cuts and to not wear the full chemical personal protective outfit was a decision based upon limited time and the desire to get home as quickly as possible because of a family event. This decision proved to be risky. Always consider the hazards associated with handling hazardous materials. Remember that chemicals don’t have a family waiting for their safe return.