



SAFETY ALERT!

Asphyxiation

This safety alert serves the purpose of alerting and educating employees and employers about the dangers associated with makeshift heaters employees tend to make when they work in uncomfortable temperatures.

Background

An employee was working a night shift duty when it suddenly became very cold. It seemed that winter was knocking on the door. The employee resorted to making a makeshift heater inside the room he was working in.

The makeshift heater caused a fire. As the room had no proper ventilation, the employee was overcome by asphyxiation due to fire consuming the oxygen. The cost of this incident amounted to **R1, 000,000.00**.

Contributing factors

- The employer didn't provide any heater or a warm working environment for his employee.
- The employee made the makeshift heater in an enclosed place in an attempt to get maximum heat.
- The employee decided to use poor quality material to keep the fire going.
- There was no health and safety official on site to approve or disapprove the heater.
- The manager didn't check on the employee personally during shift hours.
- Because of the deterioration of air quality due to the poor quality of material he was burning, the employee became unconscious.
- Due to the fact that the employee was unconscious, he didn't notice that something had caught fire.

Action Required

- Establish ways or channels where employees can express any discomfort regarding their work or working environment.
- Establish a comfortable workplace for employees.
- Instruct employees to consult with health and safety officials or their managers before making any decisions that can affect the workplace.
- Stimulate the managers to constantly check on the performance or working conditions of their employees on duty.
- Install fire and smoke detectors in the workplace or even sprinklers.
- Create awareness on the consequences on the actions that employees might take on duty outside their work specifications.
- Consider providing protective wear or warm clothing for employees working in cold conditions or areas.

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