



Safety alert 14/2009

Truck driver overcome by toxic fumes

Incident

A truck driver lost his life when a plastic kettle melted and set fire to the cab of his prime mover. The driver had stopped at a truck bay, placed the kettle on the passenger's seat and plugged the small 12/24 volt kettle into the cigarette lighter before climbing into the sleeper cab for a rest. The driver fell asleep and after he did the kettle boiled dry. Due to the kettle not being fitted with a safety cutout device, the kettle melted and eventually set fire to the seat of the truck.

The doors and windows of the truck were fully sealed. Consequently the fire self-extinguished due to a lack of oxygen, but not before the toxic fumes from the fire overwhelmed the driver, who died from carbon monoxide poisoning.

Factors to consider

- The kettle was not fitted with a safety cutout device
- The kettle was being used in an airtight environment
- The kettle was placed on flammable surface before use

Recommendations

1. If a kettle is to be used while travelling, make sure it is a type that has a safety cutout device fitted. These types of kettles may not be available at all discount auto stores, but they are available from various truck dealerships and retail outlets in Western Australia.
2. Examine the surroundings and, where possible, use portable kettles outdoors or in a well-ventilated area.
3. Before using such a kettle, consider the surface that the kettle is placed on and ensure it is not flammable.

Further information

Further information can be obtained from WorkSafe's internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email safety@commerce.wa.gov.au

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