



RIP & SHARE SAFETY HANDOUT

Pressure Wash with Extreme Caution

Although a routine part of cleanup, and an activity that some workers may consider fun after the hard work of mining, pressure washing used in the aggregates industry to clean vehicles, equipment and facilities is not a job to be taken lightly. As with all work done on behalf of aggregates producers, it must be executed safely with strict adherence to operating instructions and safety precautions.

If not done properly, pressure washing can result in serious injuries to skin, underlying tissue and eyes. Early in 2007, a worker at an aggregates facility was cleaning a forklift with a power washer set at the maximum pressure of 2300 PSI. He pointed the blast at a coworker for a brief moment. According to accident reports, the operator directed a “short, sharp blast” of water at high pressure at the other worker’s face only 12 to 18 inches away. Needless to say, the victim was seriously hurt. His lip and eye were cut and the blast made a hole in the soft area of his throat that required emergency hospital care. After a disciplinary hearing, the employee responsible for the accident was dismissed.

Pressure washing is dangerous work, especially if a chemical cleaning fluid also is being used. Remember, at close distances, the water’s jet can cut through safety boots and toes, and chemicals can burn skin and eyes, causing permanent disfigurement and loss of eyesight.

Following are basic guidelines for pressure washing compiled from several sources, including the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources 2004 *Workplace Safety Manual* and two public Web sites, *lifetips.com* and *outdoorcleaning.com*, with general guidelines for pressure washing safety.

- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment, including long-sleeved shirts and gloves, safety glasses, aprons, shields or goggles and non-slip shoes as required.
- Review safe operating practices for your equipment and perform pre-operational checks.
- Ensure ready access to and operating condition of eye wash and emergency showers in case of exposure to cleaning materials.

- Ensure fire hazards are minimized when using volatile hydrocarbon degreasers. Know the location of and ensure access to fire fighting equipment.
- Select a hose that operates within the temperature and pressure range of your pressure washer. When water is too hot, the hose core will become brittle and crack. If using chemicals, ensure that your hose is chemical-resistant. Never substitute a hose that is intended for another purpose.
- Inspect hose for abrasions, cuts and other damage. Examine coupled joints and look for damage from kinks. If a hose is damaged, throw it away immediately so that it can’t be used by mistake at a later date.
- Determine safe routing of hoses to prevent tripping hazards and unnecessary exposure to potential of ruptured hoses or leaking fittings.
- Minimize splashing of caustic solvents in dip tanks. Cover vats for cleaning cycle.
- If using chemicals, ensure adequate ventilation when inside a building.
- Be aware of loose or slippery materials, tripping hazards and other obstructions. Take appropriate measures to eliminate these conditions.
- Always keep the high-pressure hose connected to both the pump and the spray gun while system is pressurized.
- Use extreme caution when spraying near power lines, service feeds and electrical meters.



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- Refrain from using a pressure washer from a ladder, scaffolding or other unstable position. A slip or fall could result from the recoil of the initial spray or the pressure of the water striking a wall surface.
- Never point the nozzle of a pressure washer at yourself or anyone else. Never try to rinse your hands or feet with a pressure washer.
- Stop using the washer when anyone enters the work area.
- Ensure adequate rinsing or air-drying of cleaned material before touching it with exposed skin.
- Thoroughly drain and flush hoses that have been used for chemical cleaning.
- Properly store and dispose of hazardous waste and cleaning chemicals according to approved procedures.

Being informed about pressure washing equipment operation and safety is as important as knowing the hazards of other aspects of any job. Water pressure can knock someone down, cut skin and pierce eyes. Slippery surfaces around washing can lead to slips and falls. Chemicals can burn. Don't take this job on without proper planning and preparation.

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