

13 Deaths Tied to Bath Refinishing Chemical

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DETROIT (AP) — The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a warning Thursday about using a common paint-stripping chemical to refinish bathtubs after tying it to 13 deaths in 10 states.

The CDC said the alert was based on research that began at Michigan State University. Scientists found 13 deaths between 2000 and 2011 of workers using products containing methylene chloride to strip paint from residential bathtubs. Three of the deaths were in Michigan, and the remaining 10 were reported in nine

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other states.

Methylene chloride is widely used as a degreaser and paint remover in industrial and home-improvement products.

"Each death occurred in a residential bathroom with inadequate ventilation," the CDC said in its Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. "Protective equipment, including a respirator, either was not used or was inadequate to protect against methylene chloride vapor."

The report said the chemical "has been recognized as potentially fatal to furniture strippers and factory workers but has not been reported previously as a cause of death among bathtub refinishers."

Using methylene chloride-based products in confined spaces like bathrooms presents great risks, the CDC said. It urged worker safety and public health agencies, manufacturers and trade groups to "communicate the extreme hazards" of their use to employers, workers and the public.



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"Employers should strongly consider alternative methods of bathtub stripping," it said.

The alert's co-author, Michigan State's Kenneth Rosenman, said it is better to keep the chemical out of the bathroom. Its vapors are heavier than air and likely remain in bathtubs after each application.

"To use products containing methylene chloride safely, work areas must be well-ventilated, and when levels of methylene chloride exceed recommended exposure limits, workers must use protective equipment," Rosenman, chief of the school's Division of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, said in a statement Thursday. "In a small bathroom, it is unlikely these products can be used safely."

The co-author of the CDC warning, Michigan State industrial hygienist Debra Chester, first investigated the 2010 death of a 52-year-old man who owned a bathtub refinishing business. She then discovered two other Michigan deaths, leading to a National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health investigation that turned up 13 deaths.

Online: CDC report: <http://1.usa.gov/yIh2MK> [1]

Michigan State report: <http://bit.ly/xLyeqq> [2]

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