



## Safety Message of the Day for IMEA Members



### Dangers of Benzene Safety Message

Benzene is 1 of 119 agents listed as “carcinogenic to humans” by the International Agency of Research on Cancer, also known as IARC. A carcinogen is defined as any substance or agent that tends to produce a cancer. It is a widely used chemical in industrial processes as well as in consumer goods. Because of its widespread use, many individuals can face exposure to this substance both on and off the job.

### What is Benzene and Where is it Found?

On OSHA’s Substance Data Sheet for benzene, it states that: Benzene is a clear, colorless liquid with a pleasant, sweet odor. The odor of benzene does not provide an adequate warning of its hazard. As mentioned above, the substance is found in many industrial processes. It is also in crude oil and a major part of gasoline. Most of the benzene in the environment comes from our use of petroleum products. In the home, it is found in glues, adhesives, cleaning products, paint strippers, and tobacco smoke.

### Best Practices to Reduce Exposure to Benzene

For most people, the exposure to benzene is by gasoline and its vapors, however, some individuals may be exposed to it elsewhere. Some best practices to reduce your chances of being overexposed to benzene are:

- \* Do not breathe in the vapors of gasoline.
- \* Fuel in a well-ventilated area.
- \* Avoid areas with excessive automobile exhaust as much as possible.
- \* Avoid any water that could possibly be contaminated with benzene.
- \* Do not smoke cigarettes, and do not be in areas where you could be exposed to secondhand smoke.
- \* Practice good hygiene and protect your skin. Washing your hands prior to eating can reduce the chance of exposure through ingestion, and limiting skin exposure can reduce the absorption of benzene through the skin.
- \* At work, use engineering controls to reduce or eliminate exposure to benzene. If exposure is still over the limit, respirators must be worn that are sufficient enough to protect individuals from overexposure.

**Discussion point:** Discuss the sources of benzene in the workplace and the associated safeguards.