



December 2012

## Focus on...

## Preventing Worker Deaths from Methylene Chloride

A 62-year-old paint maker died while cleaning a paint tank. A 24-year-old maintenance worker died while stripping a church baptismal font. Both workers were using paint strippers containing methylene chloride, a widely used solvent that can cause death and serious illness among workers and consumers in enclosed spaces.



Photo: Bottom of a paint tank where a worker died

[Methylene chloride](#) is a cancer-causing chemical also used in the production of polymer foams and as a degreaser.

The [Occupational Health Branch](#) (OHB) of the California Department of Public Health has investigated the two worker deaths from overexposure to methylene chloride.

OHB also conducted a [survey of hardware stores](#) in the San Francisco Bay Area. Our findings suggest that many consumers may not be aware that safer alternatives to methylene-chloride-containing paint strippers are available. Whenever possible, OHB advises that employers, workers, and consumers use the [least toxic methods for paint removal](#).

OHB has created a new [safer alternatives web page](#) on preventing deaths from paint strippers containing methylene chloride.

---

### Resources

[Safer alternatives to methylene chloride for paint removal](#) web page

[OHB](#) improves California worker health and safety through prevention activities. We gather information on job hazards, test new approaches to prevent worker injury and illness, and help make changes at the workplace.

Email [OHW@cdph.ca.gov](mailto:OHW@cdph.ca.gov) with feedback about this update or change of address.