

HAZARD ALERT

Industry: Trucking, Manufacturing

Area: Vancouver Island

Workers fall ill after opening shipping container

An empty shipping container was being delivered to a water bottling plant. The driver of the delivery truck opened the container doors and noticed a strong smell. He then backed the truck, with the container doors open, up to the shipping doors of the plant. A small amount of a toxic chemical, naphthalene, remained in the container from a previous load. Several workers in the plant inhaled the naphthalene vapours and experienced nausea, dizziness, and vomiting.

The trucker then drove the container, with its doors now closed, to the local fire hall. The fire hall had to be evacuated because it was downwind from the container. Roadblocks were set up on the streets, blocking off access to the truck, and a “hot zone” or area of contamination was declared around the container. Workers sent to staff the roadblocks drove through the hot zone to get to their assigned station.

Emergency workers then opened the doors of the container. Vapours from the container flowed downwind and exposed a person, who had passed through a roadblock, at the fire hall.

Safe work practices:

- Exercise caution when opening empty shipping containers. They may contain residual amounts of hazardous chemicals.
- Check shipping containers for contamination before allowing them into enclosed areas like loading bays.
- Call emergency agencies (fire department; Ministry of Water, Land, and Air Protection) for specific instructions for emergencies involving toxic chemicals or materials.
- Plan and train for toxic material emergencies.

