SAFETY ALERT

Methyl Bromide—Toxic Fumigant In Cargo Containers

The purpose of this Alert is to notify the potential for federal workers, contractors or third parties to be exposed to Methyl Bromide, based on recent information obtained within the Comcare jurisdiction.

BACKGROUND

Cargo containers may pose a risk of exposure to toxic fumigants including Methyl Bromide.

When an inspection is conducted on such a shipping container, vehicle operators and other persons may be exposed to Methyl Bromide if containers are opened and ventilated in their presence.

What is Methyl Bromide?

Methyl Bromide is a colourless, odourless gas that is heavier than air. It is a gaseous pesticide used to completely fill a container to control pests (for example, insects, rodents or fungi).

The effects of Methyl Bromide may include headache, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, tremor, slurred speech and irritation to eyes, respiratory system and skin. Exposure to it can be fatal if inhaled, swallowed or absorbed through skin.

Control Measures

To reduce the risk before containers are opened:

1. Determine whether the container has been fumigated from warning notices or clearance certificates. If in doubt, always treat the container as if it has been fumigated.
2. Place the container in a designated open area with good ventilation.
3. Set up barricades and warning signs to prevent unauthorised access.
4. Open the container door taking care to avoid exposure.
5. Before entering, ventilate the container using mechanical ventilation for at least 30 minutes, or, where mechanical ventilation is not practicable, allow natural ventilation for 12 hours in accordance with relevant Procedures. Ventilation times will be influenced by the nature of the load and how it has been packed (for example, absorbent quality of the load, restricted airflows etc).
6. Air testing should determine that the level of Methyl Bromide is below the exposure standard of 5ppm prior to entry. Where testing indicates levels above 5ppm continue ventilation.
7. Safety Data Sheets should be referred to in applying all appropriate control measures to minimise the risk of exposure to Methyl Bromide, including personal protective equipment.
Note that:

8. Methyl Bromide is heavier than air and will settle in pockets within the load. As the load is shifted routinely, continue air testing to ensure the exposure standard is not exceeded. If the exposure standard is exceeded resume ventilation.

9. Choice of air testing equipment will be based on the flammable nature of the load.

FURTHER INFORMATION

AS2476-2008 General Fumigation Procedures

or contact Comcare on 1300 366 979.