



What Would YOU Do?: Covering Up After a Hazardous Material Container Mishap

When Carlos' family moved to a suburb in the Midwest he was glad to get work at a regional car parts production and distribution center. As part of employee orientation, workers were required to complete training on hazardous materials storage and disposal. The company stated that it complied with OSHA requirements including maintaining Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for each chemical that workers could be exposed to in the facility. The MSDS provided instructions that workers were expected to follow for handling chemical products including the company's spill control plan.

One day after being on the job for several months Carlos heard yelling on the warehouse floor. He joined a few other workers who raced over to see acetone pouring out of a storage container that a forklift operator had accidentally pierced when taking a corner too quickly. Carlos knew the liquid was extremely flammable. The spill was cleaned up and Carlos headed back to performing conveyor maintenance.

The next day Carlos' supervisor called a team meeting of all the workers who had been on the floor when the forklift accident occurred. Looking tired and anxious he explained that the acetone should not have been in that location on the warehouse floor and worse, it had been incorrectly stored in an unauthorized container. The firm's insurance required that Class IB flammable liquids be stored in Underwriter Laboratory (UL) approved safety cans. Sheepishly, the supervisor admitted that he should have caught and fixed the error before the accident had occurred. Because all of the workers present at the accident site would be required to sign an accident report he hinted that he would appreciate it if everyone went along with the report he was planning to file indicating that the acetone was in the proper container and had just been moved to that spot temporarily that day. Carlos didn't feel comfortable signing a document that he knew wasn't factually correct but at the same time the accident didn't cause any damage to anyone or anything as far as he could tell. What do you think Carlos should do? Why?

Sources:

National Institute of Occupational Safety & Health, [Pocket Guide to Chemical Hazards](#), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (Washington: GPO 2005)

National Fire Protection Association, [Flammable and Combustible Liquids Code Handbook](#), Sixth edition, ed. Robert Benedetti, 1996.

National Institute of Occupational Safety & Health, [Pocket Guide to Worker Safety Series: Warehousing](#), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (Washington: GPO 2004)

