Workplace Safety
Keeping the Workplace Poison-Free

While most poison exposures occur in the home, the workplace has its own risks. It is easy to take for granted dangers in the office, particularly when focused on getting a job done. Almost two percent of all poison exposures reported to poison centers occur in the workplace – putting workplaces a distant second to homes as sites where poison exposures occurred.

What precautions should I take to stay safe at work?

- Be careful when handling laser printer cartridges. A poison exposure can occur when laser printer cartridge resin or powder is spilled. Fumes, dust or ozone from the cartridges can be dangerous if inhaled.

- Fluorescent light bulbs contain mercury, phosphorus, or other rare gases and should be handled and replaced by professionals. The same goes for energy-efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs, or CFL bulbs.

- Beware of the lunchroom and office refrigerator. Foods stored in the company break or lunch room refrigerator can spoil, leaving the potential for food poisonings.

- Office supplies such as keyboard cleaners, markers, glues or white-out are helpful job tools. But these products can be dangerous if misused or abused by inhalation, referred to as huffing or sniffing. Make sure these key office supplies are used for their intended purpose. Read labels for all chemicals, cleaning and office supplies.

- Use air fresheners in the bathrooms or other workplace cleaning supplies properly. Mixing or handling such products improperly can cause irritation to the skin, dizziness or breathing difficulties.

- The same dangers present in the household are also a danger in the workplace. Read labels and use caution when taking over-the-counter or prescription medications, particular if high skill jobs require the handling of potentially dangerous equipment or instruments on the job.

- Be wary of bugs. Fire ants can enter an office building through leaking windows or siding. To some, fire ants are just a nuisance, but to others the infestation can cause a bad reaction. The Brown Recluse spider, as well, can be found in old stored boxes or in unused files, old file cabinets or drawers and under unmoved furniture or old carpet. The brown recluse spider can do a massive amount of damage to the muscle and skin in a short period of time and needs aggressive and immediate care. The Black Widow spider is another spider that can be found in inconspicuous places. This particular spider attacks the nervous system and can cause severe muscle pain.

The Texas Poison Center Network serves the State of Texas to prevent poisoning. TPCN offers free and confidential services 24 hours a day, seven **days a week.** If you believe you've been exposed to a poison or have questions about a substance that may be poisonous, call **1-800-222-1222** immediately.