Anti-Contamination Clothing Catches Fire



A welder was cutting metal while working in a high contamination area of a nuclear energy site. A spark or a piece of hot metal landed on the lower leg of his anti-contamination coveralls. Because he was wearing several layers of personal and protective clothing, plus a respirator and a welding mask, the flames spread before he noticed the fire. He was working alone and by the time a co-worker arrived with a fire extinguisher, the welder was engulfed in flames. He died the next day in a hospital.

Several factors contributed to this fatality. When the job was planned, not all of the hazards were considered. The worker was wearing flammable protective clothing, and he was working alone without a fire watch.

Most work situations have more than one hazard. In this case, there were many, including radioactive contamination and fire from conducting hotwork. The clothing provided protection against one hazard but not protect against the other. When you suit up for your job, make sure you are protected against all the hazards in your work area.