

Safety Alert

Risk of Leaving Hand Sanitizer in Hot Vehicles

May 2020



Tips

Reminder:

Americans everywhere are being proactive in their part to fight the spread of COVID-19. We are washing our hands and using a lot of hand sanitizer. We need to realize that a fire danger exists when we leave a bottle of hand sanitizer in a parked vehicle.

Because of the important role hand sanitizers play in efforts to minimize COVID-19 risk, the use and supply of these products are much higher. Many employees are also carrying these products around with them – in personal vehicles, company vehicles, purses, lunch pails, etc. It is important to know the risks of improper storage of this alcohol-based material.

Experts advise against leaving alcohol-based hand sanitizer in your car for long periods of time because it not only reduces its effectiveness, it may also be a fire risk.

In order for the hand sanitizer to be effective, it's alcohol percentage must be over 60%. If stored in a car for long periods of time with extended exposure to high temperatures, the alcohol in the hand sanitizer will eventually evaporate, causing it to lose its efficacy. Keeping it in the car for short periods of time such as when running errands is fine, but it should not be left in the car for long durations.

Additionally, there is a potential fire risk to storing hand sanitizer in your car. In extreme heat, it can ignite due to its high alcohol content. Here are a few things to note about some of the storage risks:

Use of alcohol-based sanitizers is perfectly safe if used and stored as intended.

Like many necessary consumer products, there are often limits and details of use that are very important to remember.

Alcohol-based sanitizers typically have a flashpoint of ~65 deg F (~20 deg C).

This is generally below most indoor working temperatures.

This is certainly below outside summer temperatures.

This is well below temperatures frequently reached inside closed up vehicles sitting in summer parking lots.

The following is a summary of a vehicle fire originating (to a non-Quanta Operating Unit vehicle) from a container of alcohol-based sanitizer left in a door compartment.



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Hand sanitizer can be a fire danger when left in hot vehicles.

“Occurrence involving alcohol hand sanitizer at 12:41 pm on April 26, 2020. The employee parked the truck and locked the vehicle. After about 30 minutes, the employee noticed something wrong with the truck, as they noticed the glass with a change in its appearance. As the individual approached, they noticed that there had been a fire at the driver’s door, in the same place where there was a container of alcohol hand sanitizer (about 250ml) that was on the door. The fire department was called, but the fire extinguished itself, probably due to the absence of oxygen in the environment.”



As we continue to take proactive steps to ensure our health and safety, we must always take the time to identify and understand where additional hazards may be present. Often times, this means learning from other incidents that occur to others in our industry.

Please remember to never leave hand sanitizer in any environment which can see elevated temperatures, such as inside a vehicle, for extended periods of time. This becomes increasingly important as the temperature outside continues to rise.

Understanding the situation which led to this incident can help us all ensure this does not happen to us or a loved one. Please take this knowledge home with you and share it with your family and friends. Lets all learn from this incident, and take action today, to ensure we continue to focus on safety both at work and at home.