It is a common practice for persons working with acids to keep on hand a container of Baking Soda (Sodium Bicarbonate) to sprinkle on spills.

When the baking soda is mixed into an acid spill there is a chemical reaction that changes the products and neutralizes the contents. During this chemical reaction a great deal of heat is created. It is not a problem if you are working with an inanimate object to do this. It is very much a health hazard if the spill occurs on a person’s body. If baking soda is added to the acid spilled on the skin, not only will the person have a chemical burn, but the reactions of the acid and base will cause a thermal burn as well.

Standard first aid treatment for almost all chemical spills remain; “flush with copious amounts of cool or cold water”. This flush should continue for 20 minutes. Be aware too that a chemical can get under jewelry and be trapped there. Remove all jewelry that may trap chemicals when treating someone for a chemical exposure.

When working with any chemicals, check the MSDS for first aid in case of a spill before you begin work. There are special circumstances when a flush may not the proper first reaction to a chemical spill. Such an example would be for a dry chemical that will react with water. This dry chemical should first be carefully brushed off the person and then a flush should be conducted and continued for 20 minutes. The flush is necessary after the brushing because small amounts of water on the skin will eventually cause a reaction if the flush is not done.

There are other circumstances when the proper care of a splash with a chemical is not to flush with water, however as previously stated such cases are rare. Be sure you are aware of the proper methods of dealing with a chemical spill for every chemical you use. Be sure you have the proper first aid requirements handy when you work with these chemicals. Know where eye wash stations or sinks are located. Be sure the MSDS you have is not over 3 years old. If there is any indication on the product you use frequently that it has changed “new and improved”, be sure to recheck the MSDS. You may find something has changed that you now need to know about.

It is easy to get comfortable with your job and feel short cuts are okay. An accident can occur so fast that you can spend years wondering why you felt a short cut was safe. Be safe and work safely. You have your whole life ahead of you.