Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Diesel Truck Battery Overcharges

Date: March 17, 2026

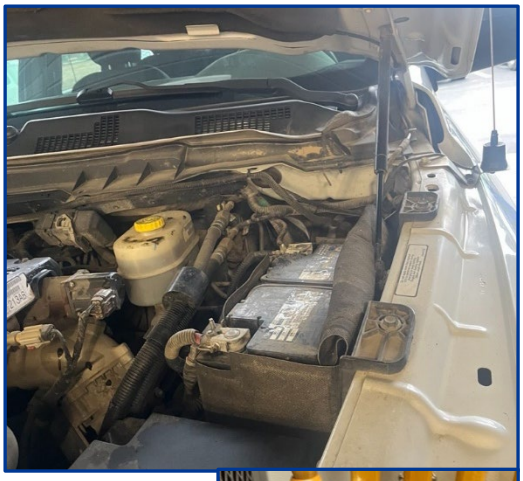
Location: Interagency Natural Resource Center (INRC), Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

Diesel Truck Battery Overcharges – Causing Dispatch Center and Warehouse Evacuation

The Interagency Natural Resource Center (INRC) houses U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Wildland Fire Service employees as well as an interagency Dispatch Center supported by Idaho Department of Lands.

This facility has a larger office building and a separate warehouse building. The warehouse includes multiple vehicle and storage bays, two labs, Chief Information Office (CIO), hotshot crew facilities, and the Dispatch Center.

The bay in which this incident occurred is separated from the Dispatch Center and CIO by a hallway. The hotshot training rooms are adjacent to it.



The vehicle's battery—that shows no visible signs of damage—and battery charger.

'Rotten Egg' Odor Forces Employee Evacuation

A recently transferred vehicle, a 2012 Dodge Ram 2500 with reoccurring battery issues, was left to charge inside a closed vehicle bay overnight. The following day, the Dispatch Center and CIO radio employees reported a strong "rotten egg" odor. This smell was so strong that the Dispatch Center Manager had employees leave the building and the CIO employees self-evacuated.

At approximately 0730 hours, the Dispatch Center Manager contacted the Facilities Manager regarding this strong odor in the building. At that time, the Facilities Manager was at a medical appointment on leave. The Facilities Manager advised Dispatch to immediately evacuate the building**,** restrict all employees from entering, and post a road guard to prevent inadvertent access. Dispatch was also asked to notify all staff as broadly as possible.

Dispatch immediately began to implement their Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) and relocated several dispatchers to the Pappy Boyington Airport, located approximately 15 minutes away. This airport houses a Forest Service Air Tanker Base, Helitack Crew, and Rappel Crew and can accommodate hosting Dispatch during such emergency situations. They were therefore able to maintain a Dispatch presence from the Pappy Boyington Airport for the remainder of that day.

The natural gas company and the HVAC (Heating, Ventilating and Air Conditioning) contractor were contacted to assess any potential hazards and to investigate equipment faults.

Hydrogen Sulfide Levels Can't Be Measured – Decision Made to Contact Local Fire Department

After his appointment, the Facilities Manager returned to the office, sent out a formal notice to all staff, and met Avista natural gas company personnel on site. It was quickly determined that the source of the odor was hydrogen sulfide from the charging diesel truck battery in the engine bay. All exterior and bay doors were opened to ventilate

the hydrogen sulfide gas. A few of the warehouse bay doors were opened and allowed to air out for approximately one hour.

Avista then declared the area "Safe," and an "All-Clear" notice was issued at approximately 0940 hours. Next, the Forest Safety Manager was contacted at approximately 1130 hours by a CIO employee who had evacuated the warehouse that morning. The employee had called to discuss the building ventilation. Being the first person to contact the Forest Safety Manager, the employee also explained what had happened.

The Forest Safety Manager then contacted the Avista operator who tested the building and learned that they did not yet have a device that could measure the levels of hydrogen sulfide in the building.

After consulting with a U.S. Forest Service Industrial Hygienist and Forest Leadership, the decision was made to contact the local fire department who could test levels of hydrogen sulfide. The Forest Safety Manager contacted the few remaining dispatchers who were now back in the building and informed them that the remaining levels were unknown and further testing was being implemented. Dispatchers were reporting headaches and chose to leave the building for the day.

The Forest Safety Manager attempted to use the administrative phone line for the fire department several times, with no answer or voicemail option. Eventually, a dispatcher advised her to use the county non-emergency line.

By 1530 hours, the city fire department arrived and walked through the building. They cleared the building, only detecting a slight electrical smell, but nothing of concern. The fire department captain verified that the fire department was there to make these assessments and calling the 911 line is appropriate. They also advised that calling Avista first is a good plan.

Five employees submitted precautionary CA-1 injury reports for exposure to hydrogen sulfide that day.

[See page 3 for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OHSA) "Hydrogen Sulfide Quick Card" flyer that includes information on detection, health and wellness, and warnings about this colorless, flammable and extremely hazardous gas.]

Lessons

- Warehouse and facilities personnel communicated well about evacuating the building and getting the natural gas company and HVAC company on site.
- Don't hesitate to call the 911 line to help with unidentified smells or uncertain levels of gases. While the natural gas company generally knew what the source was, they could not measure hydrogen sulfide levels with their "sniffer." It is unknown how much exposure the few remaining dispatchers had after the natural gas company cleared the building.
- Battery charging should only occur when able to be monitored with the vehicle outside.
- The ability to open windows in work areas may have allowed faster clean air circulation.
- Having a Continuity of Operation Plan for Dispatch allowed for continued radio coverage even though their normal facilities had been evacuated.
- Conduct an annual review of the Interagency Natural Resource Center Emergency Procedures with management and key personnel. Repeat this review whenever there are changes in key roles. Additionally, individuals in these key roles should maintain an accessible copy of the procedures for immediate reference during an emergency.

This RLS was submitted by:

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Print and Display this Quick Card in Your Shop or Warehouse

OSHA QUICK CARD™

Hydrogen Sulfide (H_2S)

Hydrogen sulfide is a colorless, flammable, extremely hazardous gas with a "rotten egg" smell. It occurs naturally in crude petroleum and natural gas, and can be produced by the breakdown of organic matter and human/animal wastes (e.g., sewage). It is heavier than air and can collect in low-lying and enclosed, poorly ventilated areas such as basements, manholes, sewer lines and underground telephone/electrical vaults.

Detection by Smell

- Can be smelled at low levels, but with continuous low-level exposure or at higher concentrations you lose your ability to smell the gas even though it is still present.
  - At high concentrations – your ability to smell the gas can be lost instantly.
- **DO NOT depend on your sense of smell for indicating the continuing presence of this gas or for warning of hazardous concentrations.**

Health Effects

Health effects vary with how long, and at what level, you are exposed. Asthmatics may be at greater risk.

- **Low concentrations** – irritation of eyes, nose, throat, or respiratory system; effects can be delayed.
- **Moderate concentrations** – more severe eye and respiratory effects, headache, dizziness, nausea, coughing, vomiting and difficulty breathing.
- **High concentrations** – shock, convulsions, unable to breathe, coma, death; effects can be extremely rapid (within a few breaths).

Before Entering Areas with Possible Hydrogen Sulfide

- The air needs to be tested for the presence and concentration of hydrogen sulfide by a qualified person using test equipment. This individual also determines if fire/explosion precautions are necessary.
- If gas is present, the space should be ventilated.
- If the gas cannot be removed, use appropriate respiratory protection and any other necessary personal protective equipment (PPE), rescue and communication equipment. Atmospheres containing high concentrations (greater than 100 ppm) are considered immediately dangerous to life and health (IDLH) and a self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) is required.

For more complete information:

OSHA Occupational Safety and Health Administration
U.S. Department of Labor
www.osha.gov (800) 321-OSHA

OSHA 3200-10N-05