



Safety Corner

An Accident Involving the Squirting of Hot Alcohol into the Eyes

There was an accident occurred when a class of students was conducting an experiment “Testing for starch in leaves”. During the experiment, alcohol was used as the solvent to dissolve the chlorophyll in the leaves. Students were asked to add only a small amount of alcohol into the test tube (about 1/3 full). After the completion of the experiment, students were instructed to pour the used alcohol into a beaker



which was placed on the teacher’s bench for proper disposal by the laboratory technician later on. When a student was trying to take out the test tube with hot alcohol from a beaker which was used as a hot water bath, a few drops of hot alcohol squirted out from the test tube accidentally because of the violent action of the student. The hot alcohol got into both eyes of him. The teacher promptly helped the victim to carry out an emergency eye washing with the use of tap water followed by distilled water from an eye wash bottle, and then bandages were used to cover the eyes of the victim. Ambulance was summoned and the student was sent to hospital for medical treatment.

This accident was due to the carelessness of the student in handling the test tube with hot alcohol. Besides, students were not asked to wear safety spectacles during the experiment.

In order to minimize the occurrence of similar laboratory accident in the future, science teachers should note the followings:

1. During experiments, students should be asked to wear safety spectacles whenever there is a risk to the eyes.
2. Students should be reminded to handle chemicals carefully.

To treat eye injury properly, the teachers should also note that:

1. Distilled water in an eye wash bottle should be used for emergency eye washing in the first instance.
2. The first aid box should be provided with sterile eye pad for first aid treatment of eye injury.

