



SPLASH ALERT – RUBBER BARK NOVEMBER 2011

Background: CHUBB was visiting several locations for a member of the ACWA-JPIA. CHUBB provides excess property and boiler and machinery coverage for the ACWA-JPIA membership. When visiting a booster pumping station, where a new generator and propane tank had been installed, the CHUBB representative noted that they were walking on a bed several inches thick of ground up tires. The ACWA-JPIA member referred to this as "tire bark" (on the web as "rubber bark"). The member stated that they had done research into the product before selecting it for use as a ground cover. The primary purpose was for weed control. At the station visited, the material covered the entire fenced area of the station (about 1,000 sq.-ft.) including around and under the propane tank and all other station facilities. The area was not irrigated or otherwise landscaped.

In discussing the material with the member, CHUBB was informed that the member had experienced several instances where the material had ignited during hot work operations (cutting and grinding), and one involving an electrical problem. All fires were readily controlled without injury or property damage. CHUBB expressed concern and agreed to look into the material.

After researching "rubber bark," a news report from June 2011 was found regarding a fire at a playground located in Clovis, California involving the material.

<http://abclocal.go.com/kfsn/story?section=news/local&id=8188527>

Studies show that wood and rubber mulch will burn easily, but if a fire starts, a wood mulch fire is easier to put out. When rubber bark mulch catches on fire, it will burn longer and hotter than wood mulch, and will be harder to extinguish. A rubber mulch fire will throw off black smoke, where the wood mulch will give off a whitish gray smoke that is not as toxic as the rubber fire. The potential for a fire is greater when mulch is used as a ground cover over a large non-irrigated area.

Recommendation: CHUBB has provided the ACWA-JPIA with the following recommendation:

LC-2011-10-1

Ground Covering Materials: The wood and/or rubber bark (recycled tire) materials used for ground covering is combustible, and can spread an exterior fire throughout the exterior area. Rubber bark is comprised of rubber tires and burns similarly. There have been several fires where these materials increased fire damage to surrounding structures and equipment, where little fire spread would have occurred if non-combustible materials were used. CHUBB recommends the replacement of the wood and/or rubber bark materials to a non-combustible stone aggregate material.

Reference: Chubb Loss Control

ACWA-JPIA members are encouraged to follow CHUBB's recommendation. These materials should be removed and replaced with non-flammable products when used:

- In large non-irrigated areas
- Close to buildings, facilities, and equipment
- Where hot work operations could occur, or exposed to sources of ignition

Non-combustible alternatives should be considered during new construction projects or upgrades.

ACWA-JPIA Risk Consultant staff and CHUBB representatives will check member's facilities for the use of wood and rubber mulch during their visits.

Questions regarding this Splash Alert can be addressed to John Haaf, JPIA Lead Risk Management Consultant, at (916) 508-1710 or jhaaf@acwajpia.com.