

5. How Smelly is Ammonia?

One thing we need to know about hazardous chemicals is their Odor Threshold. Does the chemical warn us before we have been exposed to harmful amounts?

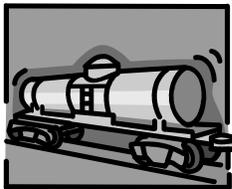


Everyone agrees that ammonia has a strong odor, but not everyone agrees on how much ammonia is present by the time we can smell it.

The Odor Threshold for ammonia has been documented in different studies as low as .04 ppm and as high as 57 ppm.

For example:

The US Coast Guard Manual says the Odor Threshold for ammonia is 46.8 ppm



The American Association of Railroads says most people can smell ammonia between 0.04 to 20 ppm.

OSHA says the Odor Threshold is between 5 and 50 ppm.

Although most organizations agree that most people can smell ammonia somewhere around 5 ppm, there is some evidence that people can lose their ability to detect ammonia after working around it for a while.

Question for discussion:

At the Happy Family meatpacking plant, workers are encouraged to report ammonia smells to management. A supervisor has gotten upset with a production worker who is constantly reporting ammonia smells. He has threatened to write her up for making up problems. He says she wastes his time by making him "chase farts". What could be the problem here? What is a possible solution?