

Safety and health alert

17/97 Removal of vehicle fuel tanks

Incident

The owner of an automotive wrecking yard in Kelmscott was removing the fuel tank from a burnt out Ford F100 motor vehicle in August 1997, when it exploded causing painful burns to 18% of his body.

The explosion occurred because the owner used oxy-acetylene equipment to cut the fuel tank holding brackets and had not thoroughly removed all remnants of fuel from the tank.

Factors

1. The hazards associated with the removal of the fuel tank were not fully assessed, particularly when it was decided to introduce a naked flame into the area.
2. The fuel tank contained a small amount of fuel and had not been purged.
3. An ignition source was introduced into the vicinity of the fuel tank.
4. Spilt fuel from the dislodged fuel tank ignited on contact with the naked flame.

Recommendations

1. When removing a fuel tank from a vehicle, as far as possible:
 - o empty the fuel from the tank;
 - o avoid spilling any fuel in the area; and
 - o remove nuts and brackets using spanners and lubricant, but without introducing heat or a naked flame.
2. If a "hot process" is to be used, it is strongly recommended that the procedures outlined in Appendix C to AS 1674.1 - 1997, Safety in Welding and Allied Processes - Fire Precautions, be followed. A steaming process for not less than 30 minutes after the whole of the equipment has become hot to touch, is just part of the procedure recommended.

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the WorkSafe internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au, or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email: safety@docep.wa.gov.au.

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