

Safety and health alert

16/99 Skylarking burns down factory

Incident

A fire that started in the spray booth of a furniture factory completely destroyed the building, valuable stock and the office containing the company records. The fire took place on the 15 February 1999.

The fire was caused by two young workers skylarking in the spray booth after they had finished work. A cigarette lighter was used to ignite a stream of highly flammable lacquer from a spray gun, producing a jet of burning liquid. The spray booth caught fire when burning vapours were drawn into the extraction system and ignited the filters. The fire spread rapidly through the building despite the efforts of workers to control it. The entire building was destroyed in about 25 minutes.

The two young workers were aware of the highly flammable nature of lacquers. There were strict rules in place regarding ignition sources in the spray booth. In spite of this they decided to have "a bit of fun". There was no intent to do any harm. They just did not consider the possible consequences.

Although no one was injured in the blaze the fire could have resulted in serious injury or death. The financial cost to the company and workers has been enormous.

Factors

1. Ignoring safety rules.
2. Misusing spray equipment and hazardous substances.
3. Playing dangerous games in a workplace without considering the consequences.

Recommendations

1. Employers and employees should regard skylarking as unacceptable behaviour because of the potentially serious outcomes.
2. Employees should not ignore rules that are meant to make the workplace safe. Employees should never misuse equipment or play dangerous games in a workplace

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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