

Safety and health alert

10/02 Explosion danger in cutting drums

Incident

A 60-year-old man died when 200-litre drum he was attempting to cut with an angle grinder exploded. The man had marked a cutting line on the drum and left both bungs secured. When the angle grinder penetrated the metal, a spark ignited residual vapours in the drum. Post incident laboratory analysis confirmed the drum had previously contained a flammable substance

Factors

- The drum had previously contained a flammable liquid and the bungs were in place.
- No equipment existed at the workplace to gas test the contents of the drum.
- The man was dressed in a shirt, shorts, socks and work boots. No evidence of appropriate personal protective clothing and equipment being used was found.

Recommendations

- The reuse of pesticide or flammable liquid drums should be avoided.
- Proper disposal in accordance with the manufacturer or supplier's instructions as provided for in the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) should always be followed.
- Make sure all drums are properly labelled.
- Do not cut any drum that is not labelled and recycled by specialist cleaning company.
- Drums, which once contained flammable liquids, are to be handled with extreme care as they may still contain vapours even after many years.
- Never attempt to cut or apply heat to drums that have contained flammable liquids or flammable gases.

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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