Auto Mechanic Dies In Explosion

A 40-year-old auto mechanic died in an explosion at his auto repair shop.

His two employees had left about 10 minutes earlier, and he was the only one working in the building at the time. He was repairing an old barrel that was used to hold waste motor oil. He had constructed a system to drain used motor oil from cars to the barrel. This system had an articulated arm made of one-inch steel pipe, an oil pan attached to one end and an adjustable support rig at the other end.

The pipe connected into a hole on top of the barrel and was supported by a bungee cord attached to the vehicle being worked on. Over time, the attachment point of the pipe became worn, and the victim was welding this area on the fuel barrel when the explosion occurred.

The victim had changed oil on a car earlier that day, and used oil (laden with gasoline fumes) was in the barrel. Sparks from the welder ignited the fumes in the barrel causing it to explode. It sprayed burning oil all over the shop area and the victim. On fire from head to foot, he was seen running out of the burning building.

The mechanic suffered third degree burns over 90 percent of his body. He died within a few hours. The auto repair shop was completely destroyed by the fire.

Investigators recommended that workers follow special procedures when welding containers that may contain flammable substances.