Explosion Tosses Worker 130 Feet into the Air

A worker was thrown 130 feet into the air and fell through the roof of another building when a cutting torch ignited gasoline vapors.

The worker had been dismantling a 5000-gallon gasoline tank. He had been using a hose from a boiler to fill the tank with steam and prevent fire while he did the cutting with a propane-oxygen torch. He was interrupted during this work to take care of another task. While he was away another worker came along and removed the steam hose and shut off the boiler. When the first worker returned to cutting the gasoline tank, he did not check to see if the steam was still running into it. When the flame of the cutting torch passed through the steel wall of the tank, the gasoline vapors inside exploded.

People who heard the explosion thought the propane tank had exploded. When the worker could not be found, it was assumed he had left for a lunch break. His body was found later on the concrete floor of a building 100 feet away, beneath a hole where he had fallen through the roof.

Cutting or welding a fuel tank is risky business because of the vapors likely to remain inside after the liquid is gone. For a dangerous job such as this one – and for any job – it is vital to establish and follow safe work procedures at all times. When returning to your work station after a break or on a new shift, check things over to make sure all safeguards are in place and no new hazards have developed.