Oil Drum Blows Up

A steel drum containing lubricating oil exploded while a worker was heating it with a propane torch.

The explosion occurred in cold winter weather in a temporary logging camp. The victim was preparing to replace oil in a loader after repairs had been carried out on it.

A 45-gallon steel barrel about one-third full of oil was placed near the loader. A 12-volt electric pump was to be used to pump oil from the barrel to the machine. Electric wires from the pump were to be hooked to the battery of a nearby pickup truck.

Because of the cold, the oil was too thick to move using the small pump. The victim then decided the oil would flow better if heated, so he lit a propane torch. The torch was left to heat the oil for about five minutes and then the pump was activated.

The victim was holding the nozzle and starting to fill the loader with oil when the pump quit. He set the nozzle down and walked back to the 45-gallon drum to see what the problem was. He apparently tipped or knocked the barrel slightly. It exploded, blowing the bottom of the barrel out. The rest of the barrel flew upwards, striking him in the face. The barrel then flew an estimated 60 feet in the air.

This hazardous procedure was apparently undertaken in a routine manner by experienced workers and little thought had been given to the danger. Always question any procedure which appears to be unsafe, even if it’s always been done that way.