

Three Welders Killed Cutting Containers

Three experienced welders were killed recently in separate incidents while using torches to work on containers they believed were empty.

In the first, a mechanic supervisor was using a torch to cut a 55-gallon metal drum that had previously contained diesel fuel conditioner. The drum exploded while he was cutting off the lid to recycle the container. The lid hit him in the head, knocking him down. He died later in a hospital.

In another incident a welder with more than 30 years of experience was fatally injured while using a torch to install a bung (plug) in a new oil delivery truck tank. The 5,000-gallon truck tank contained about 2,800 gallons of fuel oil at the time of the incident. The explosion caused severe burns to the victim, who died in hospital eight hours later.

In the third incident, a service manager was injured while torch cutting a 55-gallon metal drum that had contained windshield-washer concentrate. The explosion caused the lid to strike the victim and land about 250 feet away. He was pronounced dead on arrival at a nearby hospital.

To avoid a similar fate:

- Treat every container to be torch cut as though it contained flammable substances.
- Never weld, cut or perform other hot work on a container unless the container has been cleaned and vented thoroughly.
- Test the internal atmosphere of the container after cleaning and venting and before performing hot work.