Wood Dust – It’s Not Just a Nuisance Fatality File

Worker killed in wood-dust fire sparked by faulty fuse.

A 50-year-old production worker was seriously burned, and died 5 days later, from a fire that resulted when wood dust exploded at a wood-flour mill. On the previous day, the worker was shown a makeshift fuse that had been installed in the fuse box. A non-renewable cartridge fuse had been repaired by taping a renewable fuse element to the outside. The worker pulled out the fuse and inspected it, then replaced it in the fuse box. On the day of the incident, an explosion occurred when the worker started up the machines in the mill for the morning shift. The makeshift fuse generated a spark on startup, which ignited wood dust that had settled in the fuse box. The first explosion raised clouds of dust, which also exploded. At least three explosions in succession carried the fire to the adjacent storage area where the production worker was standing alone. He sustained second- and third-degree burns to his upper body and arms, and breathed toxic, superheated air. When the local fire department arrived, the victim was awake, alert, and oriented. He was transported to a local hospital, and transferred to the Oregon Burn Center for treatment, where he later died.

CAUSE OF DEATH: Second- and third-degree burns over half of body

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Protection devices for electrical current, such as fuses, should not be altered or bypassed.
- Good housekeeping is critical in wood-products manufacturing to maintain a dust-free environment.