

UK HSE: Worker fatally injured in oil drum explosion

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The UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) prosecuted a company after a worker was killed when an oil drum exploded during hot work.

IOGP Life Saving Rules:



Hot work

What happened?

The incident occurred when an engineer was converting old oil drums, sourced from elsewhere, into something else. He was cutting open the lids of the drums using a plasma torch. While cutting open the third drum it violently exploded, causing him fatal injuries.

What went wrong?

- Investigation revealed that the empty drums, labelled as having contained motor oil, were found to have also previously contained highly flammable gasoline, but had not been labelled correctly.
- The residual gasoline vapour present within the drums violently ignited upon the action of the hot cutting process, causing fatal injuries.
- There was a failure to provide any labelling to show that the empty motor oil drums had been repurposed to store gasoline and this created a risk of fire and or explosion.

Lessons learned

- Ensure that adequate information and labelling is provided for all used containers, drums or bottles.
- Ensure containers or drums are properly cleaned and de-gassed before conducting hot work on them.

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