

Occupational Health and Safety ALERT

DRUM EXPLOSIONS

(Post on OHS Bulletin Boards for at least 30 days)

Recently, a tragic incident occurred at an Ottawa High School that resulted in serious injuries and a student fatality. Although investigation details identifying causes have not been officially released, enough information has been made available to warn of a known hazardous situation.

Any combustible material in a container such as a drum, can give off vapours or fumes when heat is applied. Mixed with the right proportions of air, these fumes may explode violently when a critical temperature is reached or when ignited by a spark from welding, cutting torch, or mechanical tool. Even a small amount of combustible substance may generate enough vapour to cause an explosion. Sludge and deposits on a drum may seem harmless, but can generate explosive vapours if heated. Even if a drum has been empty and exposed to weather for years, it may still contain hazardous substances in seams and crevices. In addition, if washing or rinsing with proper agents is not performed correctly, effectiveness will remain questionable.



Never make assumptions - **At no time should any “hot work” – such as welding, brazing, grinding, or torch cutting – be performed on drums that may have contained flammable or combustible materials.** Never assume a drum has been emptied, cleaned, vented, and safe to cut in any way.

Death and serious injuries that may occur from an explosion includes: damage to ear drums, lungs and circulator systems from the shock wave or blast; body parts injured from penetration from explosion fragments and surrounding objects; and broken bones and internal injuries from the explosion force hurling a human body.

You are part of prevention. Make safe handling of hazardous materials an important part of your job. Attitude is everything - it's that extra something that means you care about safety.

**For questions or more information on Occupational Health and Safety:
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