

Fatality Narrative

Drywall Sprayer Burned by Flash Fire*

Industry: General contractor
Occupation: Drywall sprayer
Task: Spraying drywall with primer
Type of Incident: Flash fire/burned by flammable material

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On October 6, 2003, a worker was spraying an shellac primer on to drywall at an apartment unit when a flash fire occurred and the victim was fatally burned. The 43-year-old drywall sprayer was employed by a contractor who was subcontracted to do drywall priming and texture work as part of renovations at several apartment buildings. Shortly before the fatal incident happened, the victim had been using an airless sprayer to apply a shellac primer sealer to drywall in a two-bedroom apartment unit. He had been working for about fifteen minutes spraying primer over drywall when suspended vapors were ignited and a flash fire broke out. Coworkers rushed to the unit where they saw the victim engulfed in flames. They used fire extinguishers to put out the flames and summoned emergency medical personnel. The victim was taken to a hospital where he died several hours later. He suffered thermal burns to 95% of his body. An investigation of the incident determined that the cause of the flash fire was ignition of flammable vapors by an electrical source. The probable source of the ignition was a light bulb that burst during the spraying.

Requirements/Recommendations

(! Indicates items required by law)

- ! Control sources of ignition when using products that produce flammable vapors during spraying.
- ! If task lighting is needed, use illumination products that are rated and classified for the location and environmental conditions.
- ! Ventilate enclosed areas when flammable materials are being applied. When appropriate, use mechanical ventilation that is approved for explosive environments.
- ! Provide employees with hazardous communication training on the safe use of alcohol and oil-based primers, and all chemicals in the workplace.
- ! Use products according to the specifications of their Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS).
- Consider using, if possible, a less hazardous product that does not contain flammable material.

State Wide Statistics: This was the 60th out of 74 work-related fatalities in Washington State during the year 2003, and was the 10th construction-related fatality of the year.

This bulletin was developed at the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries to alert employers and employees in a timely manner of a tragic loss of life of a worker in Washington State. We encourage you to consider the above information as you make safety decisions for or recommendations to your company or constituency. The information in this notice is based on preliminary data ONLY and does not represent final determinations regarding the nature of the incident or conclusions regarding the cause of the fatality.

Developed by the Washington State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) and Washington Industrial Safety and Health Act (WISHA) Programs at the WA State Dept. of Labor & Industries. For more information, contact the Safety and Health Assessment and Research for Prevention (SHARP) Program, 1-888-667-4277, <http://www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Research/FACE>.