



Hot Work - Near Miss Fire in Mechanical Room

WHAT HAPPENED:

University HVAC workers were modifying an air handling system inside a building mechanical room. The work involved removing metal brackets by cutting with oxy-acetylene torch. The workers and building occupants noticed a burning smell after the cutting was complete. The HVAC workers discovered that hot slag and sparks from the hot work operation ignited the insulation on the walls of the mechanical room. The insulation was smoldering on the wall side and behind two electrical control boxes. Fire extinguishers and water were used to extinguish the smoldering insulation. Note: proper lockout-tagout procedures had been followed; the electrical panels were de-energized prior to the commencement of the work allowing the safe use of water in the mechanical room.

WHAT CAUSED IT:

The direct cause of this near miss was incomplete Hot Work procedures. The workers used all aspects of safe Hot Work operation except use of a flame resistant covering for the areas where the slag and sparks were contacting the wall.



CORRECTIVE ACTIONS: To address this incident, this department did the following:

- A program to educate employees on Hot Work procedures and on the existence of flammable insulating materials was implemented.
- The department is also exploring the option of removal of flammable insulation found on campus. Removal will most likely take place during other projects such as the replacement of this air handling equipment.

This report was prepared by the PPD Safety Committee in cooperation with EH&S.
