



CompWest Loss Lessons: Explosive Atmospheres

True Story

A plumbing contractor stored one pint of PVC primer in the van's weather-tight storage containers. According to the fire department, the primer likely released enough vapor to create a hazardous atmosphere inside the storage bin. The electronic lock system then provided an ignition source. As the photo depicts, the explosion created by primer vapors was significant enough to cause major damage to the vehicle and could have resulted in potentially serious or fatal injuries. Fortunately, no one was near the vehicle at the time of the explosion.

Lesson Learned:

Small amounts of flammable vapor, when ignited, can result in large explosions.

Prevention Tips:

- Store flammable substances in sealed containers to avoid any release of vapors.
- Eliminate sources of ignition when working with flammables. Keep away from heat, sparks, open flames and hot surfaces. Do not smoke!
- Use explosion-proof electrical/ventilating/lighting equipment. Use only non-sparking tools. Take measures to prevent static discharge.
- Read safety data sheets (SDS) for each chemical to understand its characteristics, conditions to avoid, storage practices, incompatibilities and other useful information.
- Avoid working with flammable substances in confined spaces.
- Ensure areas are well ventilated when using chemicals indoors.
- Conduct periodic inspections to ensure proper storage practices are followed.
- Ground/bond container and receiving equipment.

The advice presented in this document is intended as general information for employers. For further information, please contact your CompWest loss control consultant.

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