

## TOOLBOX TALK #27

### **HOT WORK: A PERMIT IS JUST A PIECE OF PAPER – PART 1**

Workers who perform hot work can quickly become complacent. They don't realize that simply "pencil whipping" the permit without making the area safe for hot work can place them and their coworkers at risk. It's human nature that the more frequently you perform a task the more comfortable you become with it. Before you know it, you let your guard down, skip steps, or decide you needn't worry about safety because it will just take a minute – and then the unthinkable happens. Even the best hot work program can't prevent a fire or explosion if it isn't used, steps are missed, or hazards are ignored.

#### **What is hot work?**

Hot work is any process that can be a source of ignition when flammable or combustible material is near. Any time employees work with equipment that produces a spark or open flame, or a process that generates excessive heat, there is a risk of fire.



Hot work is either done in a designated fire safe area or a permit-required area. A designated fire safe area is a location an employer assesses and maintains to conduct hot work without the need for special precautions or a hot work permit. A permit-required area is a temporary area the employer has made fire safe or assigned a fire watch to watch for and prevent fires. When these tasks are done outside of a fire safe area, an employer is required to evaluate the potential risk. A hot work permit is used to complete the evaluation.

#### **General requirements**

Before hot work starts, the employer must determine four things:

- Is hot work prohibited in the area?
- Is the area safe to do hot work?
- Can the task be moved to a fire safe area?
- Can the area be made fire safe?

An employee is assigned the task of answering the above questions. Employers choose an employee that has the knowledge and training to identify hazards and take steps to eliminate the hazards or safeguard the area. This employee is often called the fire safety supervisor (FSS) or a permit-authorizing individual (PAI). The PAI inspects the permit-required area and ensures:

- All combustibles and flammables are moved a minimum of 35 feet away from work
- Extremely hazardous combustibles and flammables moved 35 feet away or protected should still have a fire watch
- Combustibles and flammables that cannot be moved must be protected by shields, blankets, etc.
- If combustibles and flammables cannot be moved and protection is not effective, a fire watch is required
- Other employees or passers-by are protected from physical and visual (UV exposure) hazards.
- Floor and wall gaps are covered and ventilation and conveyor systems are shut down.

The PAI must also consider floor and wall construction and understand the special precautions required for wood or grated floors, metal walls, etc. A well-designed hot work permit helps the PAI inspect the area and identify hazards. Using a written permit reminds the PAI of what to look for, what precautions to take, if a fire watch is needed, and can provide proof the area is safe to do hot work.

***Check out TBT-28 in this series for more information regarding Hot Work.***