

INDUSTRY ALERT

FATALITY

Worker dies of burns in propane explosion

What happened?

After finishing his shift at a logging site, a 33-year-old worker went to the house trailer he was staying in and connected the propane tank for the first time since the trailer had been moved to the site two days before. The worker then went to bed. At about 12:15 p.m., he got up and switched on the propane stove. His supervisor was having lunch in a nearby trailer when he heard an explosion and saw the worker emerge from the trailer and roll around in the sand, trying to extinguish the flames on his body. The supervisor ran outside, switched off the propane valve and pulled the tank away from the burning trailer. He called for an ambulance on his satellite phone, wrapped the worker in a sleeping bag and put him in a half-ton truck. He drove out of the camp with the injured worker. They were met along the way by an ambulance that rushed the worker to the hospital. The worker did not survive his injuries.

Why did it happen?

The 16-metre (52-foot) house trailer was moved to the logging site two days before the explosion and fire. The trailer contained a propane-powered stove and water heater. The trailer was so badly damaged that it was difficult to determine the exact cause of the fire. Investigators concluded it was possible that a propane line or fitting had been loosened or damaged when the trailer was moved, causing the subsequent explosion.

How can it be prevented?

- Trailers being moved for any reason must have all propane lines inspected and all fittings soap-tested before the trailers are used again. Any problems such as corrosion, kinks or deterioration should be reported immediately to a qualified technician.
- A foul smell, and oily residue around fitting connections, a hissing sound or signs of frosting or freezing somewhere in the line are all potential indicators of a propane leaks. If a leak is suspected, leave the trailer without turning lights or any other electrical switches on or off, make sure the gas has been shut off at the tank valve and contact a qualified technician.
- Propane tanks and their relief valves and regulating equipment must be situated in such a way that any leaks dissipate outdoors.
- Regulation 211 under Ontario's Technical Standards and Safety Act states that workers required to use, store or handle propane or operate propane-fueled equipment must have specific training. Only a certified propane fitter may lawfully install or remove propane piping, tubing and equipment.

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