Schu's News

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Almost daily we put ourselves in dangerous situations; such as talking on cell phones while driving, smoking in gas stations or even walking your dog backwards into the wind. These are things we know not to do but often happen anyway.

Sometimes there are things not often thought of as being dangerous but can result in serious injuries. Recently I have read of one such example in the Successful Farming Magazine, I believe that this story pertains to tow vehicles, R.V'S and generators used while R.Ving as well.

This Article is By Lisa Faust Prater-Commerce Editor.

The Deadly Spark

It's always difficult to lose a family member, but the sorrow is compounded when the loss could've been prevented.

Farmers are bombarded with warnings about avoiding loose clothing around augers, keeping kids away from machinery, and being cautious when working in grain bins. But there's another danger out there, one that is as preventable as it is deadly: static electricity.

The same type of spark that builds up when sliding across the floor in stocking feet can also cause gasoline containers and vehicles to ignite.

I never thought about the serious threat that static electricity poses until my cousin, Wayne Foust, was severely burned last summer.

Wayne was mowing and needed gas. He parked his riding mower in the driveway between his car and pickup, reached over the side of his pickup bed, and pulled a gas container toward him. When the plastic can slide across the bed liner, static electricity built up. If he would have placed the can on the ground, the static would have discharged.

A Fatal Mistake

Not knowing, Wayne simply tipped the container to fill the tank. It exploded on the spot. Taking two vehicles, the mower, and my cousin with it.

Wayne lived for two extremely painful months after the accident, but passed away in September due to complications from the burns that covered most of his body. He left behind a wonderful family who loved him, including his wife, Jane and two young children, Ashley and A.J.

Our entire family was rocked by the accident, and I will never again pump gas or fill up the lawn mower without thinking about my cousin's death. The lesson from all of this, I think, is to cherish your life and family, and do whatever you can to keep them safe.

Wayne's death moved me to learn more about static electricity. Please read the following safety tips from Petroleum Equipment Institute (PEI), and share this information with your families and employees.

10 Simple Steps to Avoid Gasoline Fires Caused by Static Electricity

1. Turn off your engine while refueling. A running car (or tractor) presents a number of ignition sources for fuel vapor. Also, if a fire does occur and burns through a fuel hose, a running engine means the fuel pump will spray gasoline into the open flame.

2. Don't smoke or light matches or lighters anywhere near gasoline. This one should be obvious.

3. While refueling, do not reenter your vehicle. Sliding across the seat can cause static electricity to build up, and it can discharge at the fill point, causing a fire.

4. If you must reenter your vehicle while refueling, discharge any static before going near the fill point. Place your bare hand flat on the door or another metal part of your vehicle, away from the fill point and fuel tank. (It's a good idea to do this even if you don't reenter the vehicle, since static can also build in other ways during refueling.)

5. If a fire does occur while refueling, remove the nozzle from the gas tank. Back away from the car and alert the attendant to operate the emergency shutoff.

6. When dispensing gasoline into a container, use only an approved portable container and place it on the ground when filling to avoid a possible static electricity ignition of fuel vapors. Containers should never be filled while inside a vehicle or its trunk, or the floor of a trailer.

7. When transporting gasoline in a portable container, make sure it is secured to prevent tipping and sliding, and never leave it in direct sunlight or in the trunk of a car.

8. Fill portable containers no more than 95% full to allow for expansion. Likewise, don't overfill or top off the tank when fueling your vehicle, which can course spillage.

9. Place the cap tightly on the container after filling, and don't use containers without a good seal. If gasoline spills on the container, make sure that it has evaporated before placing it in your vehicle.

10. Be equally as careful when using diesel and other fuels. Although the PEI hasn't documented any cases of compressed natural gas igniting due to static electricity, it says, " The Higher flash point of diesel makes such an occurrence unlikely but not impossible."

For more safety tips and information on static electricity and gasoline, visit the Petroleum Equipment Institute online at www.pei.org/static or call 918/494-9696. The Institute also offers training and prevention materials and workplace safety products.

Please be careful and I'll see you on down the road.