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From John Macken
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RE: Oxygen/Acetylene incident

On Saturday 26th May 2007 a van driver pulled up outside a row of shops in the village of Wolsingham, near Bishop Auckland, County Durham. At approximately 7am the van, carrying welding equipment, exploded in a huge fireball which killed the driver and left windows in shops and homes shattered and wreckage strewn across the centre of town¹.



Fig. 1: Burning wreckage of the Van²

¹ The Sunday Times 27th May 2007

² <http://www.moosh.co.uk>



Fig. 2³ & 3⁴: Aftermath of the explosion

The immediate aftermath of the incident was captured on video and can be viewed on the Northern Echo newspaper web site (<http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk>).

It is not yet known what caused the oxy-acetylene cylinders to explode when the driver stopped his van near shops. We do not know if flashback arrestors were fitted to the equipment in this incident and whether or not the equipment was last inspected/calibrated.

The carrying of Oxy-Fuel gas cylinders in vans is a popular, and if done correctly, a safe practice.

The main point to be aware of is that the explosive range of Acetylene, when mixed with either Air or Oxygen, is between 2% and 82%.

However, without carrying out the mandatory annual inspection and calibration of the equipment there is no safeguard against faulty equipment. Also, if the driver had not been trained in the Safe Use and Operation of Oxy Fuel Gas Cutting and Heating Equipment and the daily inspection routine to ensure there was no leaking gas, then he would not have been aware of the potential dangers.

If you have any queries or require further information please call 01159 223 223.

Yours faithfully,

John Macken
for Weldcare Ltd.

³ <http://www.teesdale2000.co.uk>

⁴ <http://www.moosh.co.uk>