



U. S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board

RECOMMENDATION STATUS CHANGE SUMMARY

Report:	Evergreen Packaging Paper Mill – Fire During Hot Work
Recommendation Number:	2020-07-I-NC-R6
Date Issued:	September 24, 2021
Recipient:	Universal Blastco
New Status:	Closed – Acceptable Action
Date of Status Change:	September 19, 2025

Recommendation Text:

Update the Universal Blastco hot work policy and employee training program to specifically identify the use of heat guns as hot work. The policy and programs should make clear that hot work encompasses any method of work that can ignite a fire and not just a spark-or-flame-producing work methods.

Board Status Change Decision:

A. Rationale for Recommendation

On September 21, 2020, a paper mill operated by Evergreen Packaging (Evergreen) in Canton, North Carolina, was undergoing a planned shutdown, and associated maintenance and capital project work was ongoing throughout the facility. In one of Evergreen’s pulp bleaching units, two contract companies were performing simultaneous maintenance work inside two connected process vessels, called an “upflow tower” and a “downflow tower,” when a fire started inside the upflow tower after an electric heat gun, which was being used to warm resin, fell into a five-gallon bucket containing the flammable resin. The fire fatally injured two contractors.

The U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB) investigated the incident and found that the workers did not recognize or control the ignition hazard presented by the electric heat gun. The CSB also found that one of the contractors, Universal Blastco, did not have a standalone hot work policy. As a result of the investigation, the CSB issued three recommendations to Evergreen Packaging. This status change summary addresses CSB Recommendation No. 2020-07-I-NC-R6.

B. Response to the Recommendation

Universal Blastco provided the CSB with an updated hot work Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that defines hot work operations as work that includes any applications producing a spark, flame, or heat, and that also states that the use of any tool or piece of equipment that may be a source of heat is considered hot work requiring a hot work permit, including heat guns. Additionally, they provided an SOP on the use of heat guns and identified their use as hot work. Both SOPs had training requirements addressing various hot work and confined space hazards. A list of trained employees was also provided.

C. Board Analysis and Decision

Based upon this updated hot work policy, the Board voted to change the status of CSB Recommendation No. 2020-07-I-NC-R6 to: “Closed – Acceptable Action.”