Pumping Sets Off Fuel Tanker Blast



An explosion in a fuel tanker killed a worker loading the truck.

The cause of the explosion was a static spark generated by the pumping of a thick oil product into the tanker. The spark ignited gasoline vapors left from a previous load in the tanker.

The tanker had been flushed, which removed the liquid gasoline and sludge but not the vapors. Flushing would also have failed to remove any liquid gasoline in the air space between the compartments. These compartments are supposed to be freely draining, but three had been capped, probably because of leakage.

If you are working around a confined space – and not necessarily planning to enter that space – atmospheric testing may still be an important part of your job. In this case, testing would have disclosed the presence of explosive vapors. Some other precautions which could prevent explosions such as this one are steam filling to remove vapors from tanks, correct bonding and grounding procedures to dissipate static charge and no switching of loads. A circle check type of inspection on a such a vehicle should include a check for capping of the spaces between tanker compartments – an unsafe practice.