



The Drum

There is no doubt that 200L drums, the "old 44", have many uses around the farm and workshop. These drums, when no longer used for their original purpose, have been used as benches, working platforms, storage containers, tree guards, feed troughs and even seesaw bases. Their use is limited only to the inventiveness of the owner, but did you know that these same drums have also been turned, unintentionally, into bombs that have killed people?

There are several recorded cases of people being seriously injured or killed simply by cutting drums open or removing an end. Did an oxy torch on a petrol drum cause it?

NO! Not always, and that is the problem. Drums that have contained flammable material such as petrol, fuel, oil and paint thinners or similar should not be cut open. An angle grinder is just as likely to cause an explosion as using an oxy-acetylene torch. Some drums may have contained substances that give off flammable gases or toxic fumes when heated. These too must be treated with care.

Drums that have not contained flammable material can also explode when using an oxy-acetylene torch. The acetylene can momentarily stop burning and a concentration of unburned gases will build up inside the drum. The person using the torch will probably never know that this is happening, they won't even remember the bang as the drum splits open with enough force to tear a small shed apart.

So what are the options available for creative drum users?

Ask these questions:

- Does the drum have a red diamond on the label?
- Did the drum contain pesticides, fuels or paints?
- Are you unsure of what has been in the drum?

If you answered yes to any of the above questions, then leave the drum alone, or swap it for a better one at a drum-recycling centre. Do not use this drum as a paddock bench. If you must cut the drum, remove the stoppers, overfill the drum with water and carefully use tin snips, or similar, to cut it. Do not weld onto the drum, or near it because this may have the same heating effect and is just as hazardous. If the drum is clean & has not contained any dangerous, flammable or hazardous materials then it may be safe to cut open with hand tools, a jig saw or even an angle grinder. Never use the oxy set.

The safest approach

The safest approach is to visit a company that specialises in cleaning and cutting drums. Before applying heat to empty drums, specialist companies thoroughly clean them. They then test the inside of the drums with gas monitoring instruments, to ensure that there is no chemical residue or explosive vapour.

A final word of warning:

Do not use pressure to remove dents from drums. It is very possible that more than a dent will be removed.



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