

Technical Information

OXYGEN CLEANING OF DIVING CYLINDERS

T003

Guidance on the cleaning of dive cylinders for oxygen use

There is no legislation in Europe regarding the cleaning of breathing gas cylinders that are to be used with a higher than normal Oxygen content. It has been agreed with the HSE and other agencies that with any mixture of breathing gas that contains Oxygen more than 23% of the total needs to be treated with extreme care. There should be no hydrocarbons present at all. When a cylinder is cleaned it must be stated on the cylinder that it has undergone Oxygen cleaning. The label should say that

THIS CYLINDER AND VALVE HAVE BEEN PREPARED FOR USE WITH 100% OXYGEN ON

(ENTER DATE IN BOX)

**AND IS VALID FOR A PERIOD OF 15 MONTHS UNTIL DATE STAMPED BELOW.
IT MAY REQUIRE RECLEANING WITHIN THIS PERIOD IF FILL QUALITY IS SUSPECT**

It is not just the user who is at danger by using an elevated level of Oxygen in a non-O2 cleaned cylinder, the filler is also in great danger.

The European Industrial Gas Association quotes

Oxygen is not flammable in its self, but supports combustion. Oxygen can react with most materials. The higher the oxygen content and/or pressure in a system:

- the more vigorous the combustion up to explosive level
- the lower the ignition temperature, up to ignition, of materials that normally do not burn in air
- the higher the flame temperature and combustion velocity

Care must be taken in the selection of equipment and materials, which need to be oxygen compatible and free from contaminants. The main contaminants to be avoided and/or eliminated are hydrocarbon oils and greases, which are easily combustible and particulate matter, which can easily ignite or cause ignition.

Recognition of oxygen's reactivity led to stringent requirements regarding cleanliness of equipment in oxygen service.

The first edition of this document issued 1986 recommended procedures and agents to clean and maintain the cleanliness of surfaces in contact with oxygen, inspection methods and acceptance criteria as well as practical examples.

Cleaning with solvents (as a main procedure at that time in the oxygen industry) was recommended in most examples.

Inspectorate for Diving Equipment Servicing and Testing

Tel: +44 (0)1883 622690



The increasingly stringent environment regulations of the last years, regulations including the phasing out of most chlorofluorocarbons (CFC), restrictions in the use and the banning of some volatile organic compounds (VOC) led to the necessity to develop alternatives.

We have photographs of compressors, pipework and buildings that have been destroyed by oxygen being filled through and into pipework of equipment that is contaminated with a high level of Oxygen. They are not a pretty sight!

Remember if an incident occurs the HSE will be there immediately and will be looking for reasons why there was an incident. If it is found to be caused by not following best practice there **will** be court cases.

It is known that there are a number of Oxygen cylinder incidents each year but these are kept out of the news. Cylinders are filled by the larger commercial fillers in isolated areas.

Some areas of thought are that if the cylinder has been Oxygen cleaned and it is being filled from a "nitrox compressor" at a gradual rate there can be no incident.

This assumption is **incorrect**- Oxygen is still at a higher percentage than 23% and is still dangerous.

It cannot be guaranteed that there are no Hydrocarbons passed on filling and cylinders should be cleaned as recommended.

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