



SAFETY ALERT

Welding sparks trouser fire

Name:

Date Read:

WHAT HAPPENED

A farmer, who described themselves as a casual welder, was doing welding repairs on a tipper trailer drawbar. It was a bigger job than estimated, so that meant they were really 'going for it' and didn't take breaks. There was some rust on the drawbar which caused welding spatter. The farmer was welding outside as usual and it was a hot day. They started to notice things were getting a bit *too* hot. It was only when they looked down at their legs that they saw their trousers had caught fire from the spatter. Their immediate response was to get water on the fire, but water was very slow to come through the long hose. As a result, the fire burnt their leg so badly they needed skin grafts.

WHY DID IT HAPPEN

The farmer would normally have a bucket of water on hand and wear trousers made of heavy cotton. On this day, they assumed the hose outside was a fire safety solution, and they wore different trousers than usual. They assumed their trousers were heavy cotton, but later they found out they were mostly synthetic material. The trousers were a bit long in the leg and that created cuffs that caught the welding spatter. While their thick woollen socks underneath protected their shins, the socks also masked the fire until it got above the sock line. The reality for the farmer was that their ideas for fire safety didn't hold up when they only had seconds to act – the fire took hold very, very quickly. They had a fire extinguisher in the shed and a water trough nearby, but both solutions would have taken too long. The farmer realised in hindsight they could have disconnected the hose and used the tap – but they didn't think straight with their trousers on fire.

KEY LESSONS

- If you're going to break routine or change the gear you normally use, ask yourself, 'what's different today and how does that change what I do to work safely?'
- Work within your abilities. Experience doesn't always equal ability so be realistic about your skill level and whether you're prepared to take the time to do it safely, with the right PPE, within a safe environment. This farmer has since increased their welding skills and will get expert help when they need it.
- Prepare the job before welding. Clean rust, paint, oil, grease and other contamination. Poor preparation can increase spatter. Check your work area after welding for spatter, as it can smoulder in clothing, rubbish, and dry grass.
- Use welding PPE, not ordinary work clothes – proper welding trousers, leather protection, gloves, boots, and spats.
- Even though this alert is about spatter causing fire, welding creates a range of hazards, especially fumes.

This video is a good overall resource: [Welding Safety](#).

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