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## Standard Guide for Studying Fire Incidents in Oxygen Systems<sup>1</sup>

This standard is issued under the fixed designation G145; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reapproval. A superscript epsilon ( $\epsilon$ ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

### 1. Scope

1.1 This guide covers procedures and material for examining fires in oxygen systems for the purposes of identifying potential causes and preventing recurrence.

1.2 This guide is not comprehensive. The analysis of oxygen fire incidents is not a science, and definitive causes have not been established for some events.

1.3 The procedures and analyses in this guide have been found to be useful for interpreting fire events, for helping identify potential causes, and for excluding other potential causes. The inclusion or omission of any analytical strategy is not intended to suggest either applicability or inapplicability of that method in any actual incident study.

NOTE 1—Although this guide has been found applicable for assisting qualified technical personnel to analyze incidents, each incident is unique and must be approached as a unique event. Therefore, the selection of specific tactics and the sequence of application of those tactics must be conscious decisions of those studying the event.

NOTE 2—The incident may require the formation of a team to provide the necessary expertise and experience to conduct the study. The personnel analyzing an incident, or at least one member of the team, should know the process under study and the equipment installation.

1.4 **Warning**—During combustion, gases, vapors, aerosols, fumes, or combinations thereof, are evolved, which may be present and may be hazardous to people. **Caution**—Adequate precautions should be taken to protect those conducting a study.

1.5 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

<sup>1</sup> This guide is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee G04 on Compatibility and Sensitivity of Materials in Oxygen Enriched Atmospheres and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee G04.02 on Recommended Practices.

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### 2. Referenced Documents

#### 2.1 ASTM Standards:<sup>2</sup>

- E620 Practice for Reporting Opinions of Scientific or Technical Experts
- E678 Practice for Evaluation of Scientific or Technical Data
- E860 Practice for Examining And Preparing Items That Are Or May Become Involved In Criminal or Civil Litigation
- E1020 Practice for Reporting Incidents that May Involve Criminal or Civil Litigation
- E1138 Terminology for Technical Aspects of Products Liability Litigation (Withdrawn 1995)<sup>3</sup>
- E1188 Practice for Collection and Preservation of Information and Physical Items by a Technical Investigator
- E1459 Guide for Physical Evidence Labeling and Related Documentation
- E1492 Practice for Receiving, Documenting, Storing, and Retrieving Evidence in a Forensic Science Laboratory
- G63 Guide for Evaluating Nonmetallic Materials for Oxygen Service
- G88 Guide for Designing Systems for Oxygen Service
- G93 Practice for Cleaning Methods and Cleanliness Levels for Material and Equipment Used in Oxygen-Enriched Environments
- G94 Guide for Evaluating Metals for Oxygen Service
- G114 Practices for Evaluating the Age Resistance of Polymeric Materials Used in Oxygen Service
- G124 Test Method for Determining the Combustion Behavior of Metallic Materials in Oxygen-Enriched Atmospheres
- G126 Terminology Relating to the Compatibility and Sensitivity of Materials in Oxygen Enriched Atmospheres
- G128 Guide for Control of Hazards and Risks in Oxygen Enriched Systems

<sup>2</sup> For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, [www.astm.org](http://www.astm.org), or contact ASTM Customer Service at [service@astm.org](mailto:service@astm.org). For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

<sup>3</sup> The last approved version of this historical standard is referenced on [www.astm.org](http://www.astm.org).

2.2 *Compressed Gas Association (CGA) Standards:*<sup>4</sup>

**G-4.4 Industrial Practices for Gaseous Oxygen Transmission and Distribution Piping Systems**

**G-4.8 Safe Use of Aluminum Structured Packing for Oxygen Distillation**

2.3 *National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard:*<sup>5</sup>

**NFPA 53 Fire Hazards in Oxygen Enriched Atmospheres**

**NFPA 921 Guide for Fire and Explosion Investigations**

2.4 *Occupational Safety and Health Act:*<sup>6</sup>

**OSHA Process Safety Management Compliance Manual**

2.5 *ASTM Adjuncts:*

Video: Oxygen Safety<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—See Guides **G63**, **G94**, and **G128** for the terms listed in this section.

3.1.1 *oxygen compatibility, (also oxidant compatibility), n*—the ability of a substance to coexist with both oxygen and a potential source(s) of ignition at an expected pressure and temperature with a magnitude of risk acceptable to the user.

3.1.2 *qualified technical personnel, n*—persons such as engineers and chemists who, by virtue of education, training, or experience, know how to apply the physical and chemical principles involved in the reactions between oxygen and other materials.

3.1.3 *oxygen-enriched, adj*—a fluid (gas or liquid) mixture containing more than 25 mole % oxygen.

3.2 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:*

3.2.1 *incident, n*—an ignition or fire, or both, that is both undesired and unanticipated, or an undesired and unanticipated consequence of an ignition or fire that was anticipated.

3.2.2 *direct incident cause, n*—the mechanical or thermodynamic event (such as breakage of a component or near-adiabatic compression), the physicochemical property (such as heat of combustion), the procedure (such as a valve opening rate), or any departure(s) from the intended state of any of these items, that leads directly to ignition or fire, or both.

3.2.3 *fractional evaporation, n*—the continuous evaporation of a quantity of liquid that results in a progressive increase in the concentration of a less-volatile constituent(s).

3.2.4 *Contaminant, n*—unwanted molecular or particulate matter that could adversely affect or degrade the operation, life, or reliability of the systems or components upon which it resides.

3.2.5 *Contamination, n*—(1) the amount of unwanted molecular non-volatile residue (NVR) or particulate matter in a system; (2) the process or condition of being contaminated.

<sup>4</sup> Available from Compressed Gas Association (CGA), 4221 Walney Rd., 5th Floor, Chantilly, VA 20151-2923, <http://www.cganet.com>.

<sup>5</sup> Available from National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), 1 Batterymarch Park, Quincy, MA 02169-7471, <http://www.nfpa.org>.

<sup>6</sup> Available from Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), 200 Constitution Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20210, <http://www.osha.gov>.

<sup>7</sup> Available from ASTM Customer Service, 100 Barr Harbor Drive, West Conshohocken, PA 19428-2959. Request Adjunct ADJG0088.

Discussion—Contamination and cleanliness are opposing properties: increasing cleanliness implies decreasing contamination.

### 4. Summary of Guide

4.1 Following a fire incident in an oxygen-enriched atmosphere, the equipment, operating procedures, and area are considered in light of other incidents, potential contributing factors, suggested analytical strategies, and demonstrated laboratory results. The goal is to determine direct cause(s) of the incident in order to prevent a recurrence.

### 5. Significance and Use

5.1 This guide helps those studying oxygen system incidents to select a direct cause hypothesis and to avoid conclusions based on hypotheses, however plausible, that have proven faulty in the past.

### 6. Abstract

6.1 A series of possible causes and common scenarios are described to assist those seeking to understand incidents in oxygen-enriched atmospheres. Many easily misinterpreted factors are described to help avoid faulty conclusions. Several suspected but unproven incident scenarios are described. Select laboratory data are presented to support assertions about direct causes of incidents.

### 7. Direct-Cause Analysis

7.1 In this guide, the direct cause of an incident is the mechanical or thermodynamic event (such as breakage of a component or near-adiabatic compression), the physicochemical property (such as heat of combustion), the procedure (such as a valve opening rate), or any departure(s) from the intended state of any of these items, that leads directly to ignition or fire, or both. A fire might also be the result of a financial decision, worker skill, or manufacturing process—all of which can be viewed as causes—but such factors are addressed more properly in a system hazard review. It is noteworthy that some fires are anticipated and the risks (whether human or economic) are addressed by such things as shielding (for example, to control human risk) or acceptance (for example, to address economic risk). In these cases, a fire is not an “incident” unless some aspect of the event exceeded expectations the initial parameters (for example, the shielding did not provide the expected containment, or the cost exceeded projections). This guide seeks to identify the material choice, equipment design, assembly procedure, or other factor that led directly to the fire—and more specifically, to distinguish the physical object or action that caused the fire to start, to continue, or to be injurious or destructive. Remedial actions are found in other documents such as Guides **G63**, **G88**, and **G94**, and Practice **G93**, as well as NFPA 53, CGA G-4.4, and G-4.8, OSHA *Process Safety Management Compliance Manual*, and others.

7.2 *Example*—The direct cause of an incident may be concluded to be the use of an incompatible material, for example, a polyacetyl component was installed when a material such as PTFE (polytetrafluoroethylene) or CTFE (chlorotrifluoroethylene) was preferred. The direct cause was not that

the budget was inadequate to cover the cost of PTFE; nor that specific frictional properties of polyacetyl were required for mechanical purposes; nor that an incorrect part was installed in error. Note that in this example, PTFE and CTFE might be needed to prevent or cope with ignition and fire, but that they might introduce non-fire-related issues such as loss of mechanical strength or production of toxic decomposition products when exposed to heat of compression.

## 8. Elements of a Study

8.1 *Overview*—The study of an oxygen incident typically begins (preferably promptly) after the event has concluded. The fire is extinguished and any safety requirements or immediate needs are addressed (treating injuries, returning systems to a safe state, and so forth). Then the investigator can begin to document the event, to preserve the artifacts, and to detect how they may have been altered or compromised by the event and follow-up activities. Although many of these steps are itemized here, the intent of this guide is not to specify how or in what order they should be conducted. Rather, information is offered about certain procedures that have been effective in the past, as well as some that have led to faulty conclusions. Typically, good scientific and laboratory skills are useful and adequate. Forensic skills and procedures can be helpful in many cases, but may not be practical in all. For example, the forensic Guide E1459 can assist with managing post-incident artifacts, and related Practices E1492, E620, E678, E860, E1020, and E1188, as well as Terminology E1138, may have other uses. However, when a forensic approach is needed because a legal action is involved, the insights in this guide may effectively supplement it.

8.2 *Documentation*—Urgent post-incident efforts include: photographing or videotaping the site and any damaged equipment; obtaining system drawings, supporting design analysis, process hazards analysis, and any other hazard-evaluation materials; interviewing persons knowledgeable about the system, operating procedures and the events before, during, and after the fire; collecting specimens, operating logs, and related information; and preliminary formulation and testing of hypotheses.

8.3 *Analysis*—The principal effort in a study will be analysis of the data and artifacts. This may require further examination of the equipment and records, laboratory study of selected items, and perhaps even laboratory simulation of the incident.

8.4 *Completion of Study*—An incident study is complete when the qualified technical personnel involved in the study conclude that the event is understood.

8.4.1 An incident might be understood adequately when a conclusion has been drawn about the direct cause of the event. The following examples show the distinction between direct causes and causes that are not physicochemical or thermodynamic events.

8.4.1.1 *Example 1*—A substantial amount of hydrocarbon oil was introduced into a system just before an incident. This single factor may be identified as the direct cause of the fire. Any reasons for introducing the lubricant may be important to a new hazard review, but are not the direct cause of the fire.

Prevention can focus on cleanliness. *Initiating Event*: ignition of an incompatible oil. *Direct Cause*: contamination of the system.

8.4.1.2 *Example 2*—Records may show that a component broke and produced a rub in a piece of machinery just before an incident. This factor alone can ignite a fire and could be identified as the direct cause. If the component broke because it contained a flaw, the flaw might be determined to be the direct cause. However, if the part was selected because it offered economy, then the direct cause is still the inadequate part—not a misguided effort to economize. Prevention in this case can focus on component quality. *Initiating Event*: friction during the rub. *Direct Cause*: Mechanical failure.

8.4.1.3 *Example 3*—Deviation from an important operating practice, such as first equalizing downstream pressure with a bypass valve before opening a quick-opening valve, may be established as the direct cause of a fire. The reasons for departing from mandated practice are important, but they are not the direct cause. Here, prevention can focus on following standard operating procedures. *Initiating Event*: approximately adiabatic compression. *Direct Cause*: incorrect operation.

8.4.2 An incident might be understood adequately when a conservative tactic has been identified that would have prevented or safely managed the event.

8.4.2.1 *Example 1*—If an item of machinery cannot employ oxygen-compatible materials because they compromise its operating economy, and it becomes the site of a fire and injures someone, then the event may be understood adequately (regarding preventing recurrence of injury rather than fire) when inadequate shielding or inadequate mechanical design or some other comparable factor is identified singly or in combination as the direct cause.

8.4.3 The study is complete when the direct cause has been determined. Preventing the repetition of an event is the function of a hazard review using well-established techniques, including the use of related standards from ASTM Committee G04. The hazard review may be integral to the incident study and may involve some or all of the same people, but it is a separate activity for the purpose of this guide.

## 9. Factors Affecting an Incident Study

9.1 *Missing Components*—Following some oxygen incidents, components have appeared to be absent, leading to speculation that the component was not installed or that its mechanical failure and passage through the system were at fault. Sometimes, the damage is so negligible that the possibility that there was no fire is considered. These conclusions can be in error. In an oxygen-enriched atmosphere, combustion can be remarkably clean. A simple polymer may be converted totally into carbon dioxide and water, leaving no trace of its prior presence. If the component is small or if it has a low heat of combustion, there may be no evidence of heat damage. For example, PTFE seats in ball valves (which are large and have low heat of combustion) and nylon seats in cylinder valves (which are small and have high heat of combustion) have burned completely in some incidents with no melting of metal components, no appearance of residual carbon, and no remains of the polymer itself.



## 9.2 Contamination:

9.2.1 When contamination is present in an oxygen system, the contaminant may serve to start the incident. The ensuing fire involving the polymers, metals, and contaminant may consume the contaminant fully, leaving no indication of its original presence.

9.2.2 When contaminant levels are high, they may produce so large an explosive event that the system integrity can be breached, and the fire can be extinguished without complete combustion of the contaminant. Therefore, some of the contaminant may be found after an incident in the same regions of the system where the fire occurred. In these instances, the flammability of the contaminant can be so much greater than that of the metals and polymers that there may be only scant damage to the system materials.

9.2.3 *Example*—In laboratory tests of an oxygen system component, hydrocarbon lubricating oil was introduced and ignited. When the amount of lubricant was small, a fire may or may not have resulted, but there was usually no trace of the oil after the test. When the amount of lubricant was large, the component was blown apart. Threads on the component parts were stripped. A pressure gage was in fragments. After the event, neither melting nor consumption of the components was observed, and the parts had an obvious coating of the oil.

9.2.4 *Carbon or Black Dust*—In many incidents, a black powder will be present on many surfaces. The powder could be unreacted carbon from incomplete combustion of organic materials either inside or outside the component. However, some powders that look like carbon are not. For example, fires involving aluminum in gaseous or liquid oxygen may produce a black (and in some cases gray) powder that is largely unreacted aluminum. Indeed, such dust may be present as a result of a fire involving aluminum, or it may be present because of fabrication processes. In metal inert gas (MIG) welding, aluminum is vaporized and condenses as a black dust in the region of the bead. If this powder is present in an oxygen system, it may be a cause of ignition, because it is very flammable and has been observed burning even in air.

9.2.5 *Oil*—Oil in oxygen systems can be a severe hazard (1).<sup>8</sup> Many oils, hydrocarbons in particular, are relatively volatile in comparison to metals and polymers. Their autoignition temperatures are much lower than those of most other materials (metals and nonmetals) used to fabricate oxygen systems, including many materials not generally regarded as oxygen compatible. Therefore, heat of compression can ignite oils much more easily. Furthermore, many oils burn very rapidly, even explosively, and they are always a strong candidate as the cause of an oxygen incident.

9.2.5.1 Simple ultraviolet black light inspection of a site and incident artifacts is a convenient way to identify the presence of some oils. Many oils do not fluoresce. Therefore, the discovery of oil-like fluorescence suggests oil as a potential cause, but the absence of fluorescence does not necessarily rule out contamination with oil as a cause.

9.2.5.2 The use of ultraviolet light has other limitations. Many materials besides oil fluoresce. For example, there is a

fluorescent constituent in blood that might be mistaken for oil contamination if injuries occurred and components became wetted with blood.

9.2.5.3 The absence of an oil residue cannot rule out oil contamination as a potential cause of an incident. The need to avoid oil contamination is often ignored by system users/operators who are not well trained or knowledgeable about oxygen compatibility issues. There is a general view that lubrication is beneficial, and there are few convenient sources of oxygen-compatible lubricants.

## 9.3 Particle Impact:

9.3.1 Impact and subsequent ignition of particles in oxygen systems has been demonstrated to have been the cause of several fires. This ignition mechanism is especially likely at and just downstream of locations where the velocity of the oxygen is sonic (any location across which there is about a 2:1 absolute pressure drop), and has been demonstrated at velocities as low as 150 ft/s (50 m/s) (2).

9.3.2 References 3-5 describe incidents thought to have been affected by particle impact.

9.4 *Debris Sumps*—Many systems contain regions where debris tends to collect. Particle debris can accumulate at low points or stagnant side branches. If the piping for a bypass valve is connected to the bottom region of a horizontal run of pipe, debris that passes through the system may drop into the stagnant upstream legs of the bypass run. If this valve is then opened, accumulated debris is injected into the high-velocity valve and may cause a fire either in the bypass run or further downstream.

## 9.5 Heat of Compression:

9.5.1 When a gas is compressed rapidly, its temperature rises. The pressurization of a system tends to produce the greatest temperatures within the gas initially in the system. The increase in temperature can cause autoignition of some system components. This compression is nearly adiabatic and typically occurs at system end points or trapped volumes. In extreme cases, heat of compression has produced some of the most explosive (rupturing and fragmenting components) and most probable mechanisms of oxygen fires. In severe cases, a heat of compression fire may occur on the very first pressurization of a system. Every incident should be examined for a mechanism that may have enabled rapid gas compression and for where the compressed gas may have been located relative to the fire damage.

NOTE 3—Oxygen system fires require an energy source to trigger ignition, as do most fires. Particle impact and compression heating were briefly described above since they are very often implicated in oxygen system fires; however, several other ignition mechanisms are known to occur. The most common ignition mechanisms are discussed in greater depth in Guides G88 and G128.

9.5.2 References 6-10 describe theory and experimental work on heat of compression.

## 9.6 Overpressure:

9.6.1 A fire in an oxygen system can produce overpressure damage from pressures increasing beyond the system's physical containment capabilities. It also can result from damage or erosion that reduces system pressure containment capabilities

<sup>8</sup> The boldface numbers in parentheses refer to the references listed at the end of this guide.

to below normal pressure exposure levels. Among the characteristics that may be seen are bulging, bursting, venting, explosion, and fragmentation.

9.6.2 *Bulging*—Bulging or swelling of components can occur at the site of an explosion or at weak regions of the system, or both. In brazed copper systems, it is common to see overpressure effects at annealed regions, such as just outside brazed joints, where hardened tubing will be annealed and therefore of lower strength. The presence of such bulging in brazed copper joints in a local region only suggests a localized explosive event. Bulging at many such joints may also indicate a systematic pressure increase.

9.6.3 *Bursting*—Vessels that burst into several large pieces typically have failed along weak regions or flaws and have been exposed to either a small or slow explosive event (such as deflagration) or to a general systematic pressure rise that has been relatively slow. Common gas phase combustion, or deflagration, often proceeds with a propagation velocity of the reacting zone of up to about 30 ft/s (10 m/s), well below the speed of sound.

9.6.3.1 Cylindrical vessels designed properly and pressurized slowly to failure often fail in a characteristic way; a tear starts at a weak point in the wall of the cylinder and propagates longitudinally in both directions until it reaches the head, where it propagates along the edge of the head. Sometimes the head may be torn totally free, while the vessel often remains as one piece. Fig. 1 shows how a ruptured cylindrical vessel might look if flattened fully.

9.6.3.2 In some metal alloys such as aluminum alloys, piping is extruded with dies and mandrels in a way that can produce weak longitudinal seams. Overpressure, either slow or fast, can cause tears along these seams, yielding several similar pieces. This can occur at pressures much lower than those normally expected to cause fragmentation.

9.6.4 *Fragmentation*—When a vessel is fragmented into many small pieces of dissimilar shapes and sizes, it usually suggests a very fast combustion that produced pressures well

above the burst pressure of the vessel, before the vessel actually fails. This type of failure is also commonly known as a “brittle” failure.

9.6.4.1 Vessels that burst into many small pieces are often associated with a detonation. Whereas deflagration is relatively slow (see 9.6.3), in some very flammable conditions, called high-explosive, the velocity may achieve 3000 to 9000 ft/s (much faster than the speed of sound). In the latter instance, relief valves and vents are ineffective in limiting system pressures, and fragmentation often results with the production of small fragments. However, it is not always possible to infer that fragments resulted from a detonation. In recent times, the testing of flammable metals in liquid oxygen has produced two-phase combustion and vessel fragmentation, and it is not certain at present that the combustion rates were in excess of the speed of sound. This has led to the description of these events as “violent explosive reactions (VERs)” rather than detonations.

9.7 *Time Delays*—Most oxygen fire incidents are associated with a prior transient event, usually operation of a valve, that often is causal to the event. Most of the time the fire occurs almost simultaneously with the transient event, but there can be appreciable delays.

9.7.1 *Example 1*—An oxygen system is pressurized when a valve is opened. About 30 min later, a large leak develops in a closed PTFE-seated ball valve downstream, or the ball valve downstream is found to be hot. It is possible that the pressurization produced heat-of-compression temperatures above the ignition point of the PTFE valve seat. Because the valve was closed, the inert combustion products could accumulate and slow combustion to the point where it may have taken 30 min or more to breach the seat or to make the valve hot enough to detect. In pressurized oxygen index tests of PTFE rod burning in flowing oxygen/nitrogen mixtures near the end point, 30 min or more were required to burn a 75-mm (3-in.) long rod.

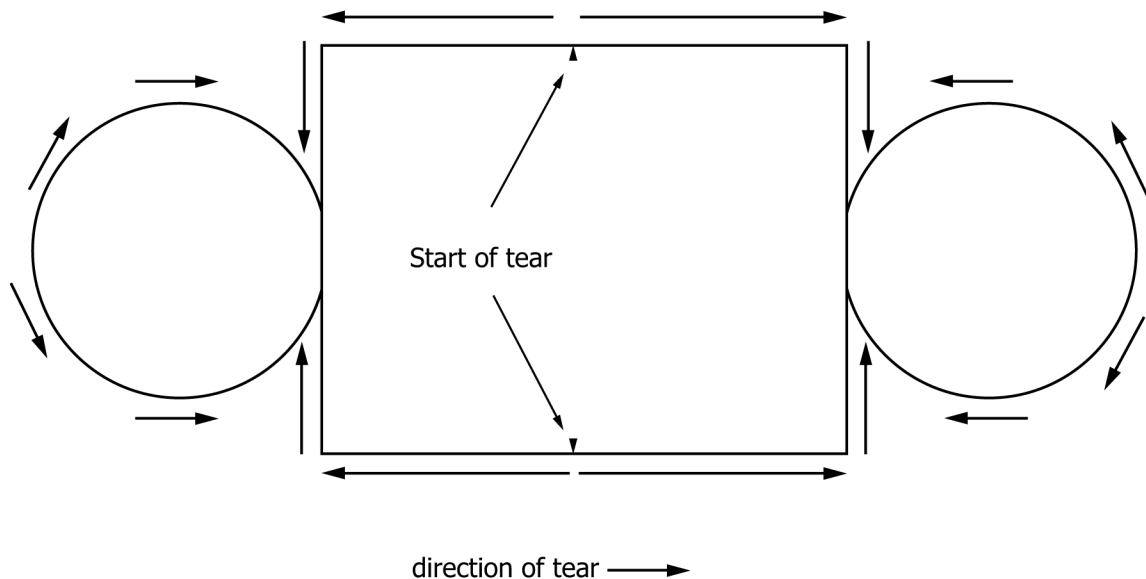


FIG. 1 Illustration of How A Ruptured Cylindrical Vessel Might Look if Fully Flattened

9.7.2 *Example 2*—Liquid oxygen flow to a waste vaporizer is interrupted, and the waste line clears itself. Several hours later, an explosion breaches a vertical run of piping where liquid could collect. In this case, liquid with a low level of contaminants can fill a sump and slowly evaporate while concentrating flammable constituents (see 10.2 on fractional evaporation). When a flammable mixture is developed, an ignition source can produce the delayed event.

9.8 *Crevice*—A crevice can be a potential ignition cause in liquid oxygen (LOX) systems if it fills with liquid, especially through a narrow passage or pore. When the vessel is drained and warmed, high pressure and high velocity will develop in the liquid, if the passage is small, as it tries to escape. If the crevice is in a weld of a metal that produced MIG weld dust, it may contain fine, easily ignited particles that may become entrained in the flow and impact a piping intersection or valve seat, causing ignition. If the liquid contains a low level of contaminants, the liquid in the crevice may concentrate contaminants as it evaporates (see 10.2 on fractional evaporation), and may inject sensitive hydrocarbon contaminants through the passage. These events have been crudely demonstrated in laboratory tests and are believed to have resulted in some metal ignitions.

#### 9.9 *Surface Discoloration:*

9.9.1 *Pink Brass*—During a fire, brass alloys may be exposed to brief, intense temperature or to corrosive chemicals, resulting in a surface depletion of the volatile zinc constituent. The result can be a pink hue on the brass surface that is not contamination and that is also not likely to be associated with the cause of the incident.

#### 9.10 *Flash Fire:*

9.10.1 There are often two distinct phases in an oxygen incident: an initial flash fire of the most flammable portion of the system followed by slower, more enduring general combustion.

9.10.2 In laboratory tests employing igniters or contaminants, there often is a pressure spike only several milliseconds in duration that signals the start of the event.

9.10.2.1 *Example 1*—In the 1960s, tests of animal carcasses showed that when the carcass was ignited in oxygen, the fire spread first over the carcass surface, burning away very fine hair. This flash fire occurred in a split second, even under snug cloth wrappings that simulated clothing. In the second stage, a widespread fire of the cloth and carcass fat often developed that appeared to be nearly simultaneous over the entire surface (11).

9.10.2.2 *Example 2*—In a hospital operating room, oxygen is used to improve a patient's oxygenation during surgery. On occasion the oxygen may accumulate under the surgical drapes in sufficient quantities to substantially increase the local oxygen concentration. Subsequent ignition produced a rapid fire of the very fine nap of the bedding (so fast that it was described as a spark), followed by a general fire of the cloth. This flash fire of the nap of material and clothing has been demonstrated experimentally (12,13).

9.10.3 The prospect of an initial flash fire involving surface contaminants is one reason that low levels of oil in an oxygen system may not be discoverable after an incident, despite the

possibility of having played a crucial causal role either in ignition or in the related kindling chain.

#### 9.11 *Explosive Decompression:*

9.11.1 When a gas permeates or dissolves into a material at high pressure and the surrounding pressure is released at a rate faster than the gas can diffuse out of the material, then the material becomes a sort of pressure vessel. If the material is an elastomer, it can swell like a balloon, sometimes more than doubling its apparent size (14,15). The internal pressure can cause the elastomer to exceed its tensile strength, and it can burst. This is explosive decompression.

9.11.1.1 Some O-ring design handbooks have described explosive decompression as a potential source of ignition in oxygen systems. The events believed to occur during explosive decompression (tearing, friction, high gas velocities, and so forth) are all plausible elements of ignition. However, Committee G04 has not located any original data supporting this potential mechanism, nor is Committee G04 aware of any laboratory tests that have produced ignition in this way, or any incidents believed to have been caused by this mechanism.

9.12 *Intimate Mixture*—Intimate mixing can lead to increased flammability. Materials that dissolve in liquid oxygen tend to be high explosives. Among the factors that lead to increased flammability in intimately mixed (homogeneous) fuel and oxidant systems are adiabaticity, accessibility to oxidants, and so forth.

#### 9.13 *High Surface Area to Volume Ratio:*

9.13.1 Systems with a high surface area-to-volume (SAV) ratio exhibit intimate mixture that leads to great flammability. It is well demonstrated that the finer a metal powder is ground, the more rapid will be its reaction with oxygen. High SAV ratio systems include sintered filter media, packed columns, powders, and dusts.

9.13.2 *Porosity*—Porous systems exhibit high SAV. Often, the flammability of a high SAV ratio system may not be obvious due to the small amount of oxidant present. For example, a small amount of LOX spilled onto a porous asphalt surface can be viewed as an intimately mixed, high SAV ratio system (see 9.13.1) (16). Other examples would include LOX impregnating a powder, fines ground in a system, an open-cell foam, or any spongy material.

#### 9.14 *Fresh Metal Exposure (FME):*

9.14.1 Fresh metal exposure is an often-considered ignition source. In theory, the surface of a system is damaged by two parts rubbing together, by spalling of an oxide, by development of a small crack, and so forth. The model proposes that fresh metal is exposed and begins to react with oxygen. This oxide formation releases heat that initiates a chain reaction of oxide formation and heat release until ignition and a potential fire occur. This mechanism is suspected most commonly in metals that have very protective oxides whose formation is highly exothermic.

9.14.2 Titanium has exhibited FME ignition in numerous laboratory tests (17).

9.14.3 The FME effect does not appear to have been demonstrated with metals other than titanium. Although aluminum has many physical and thermodynamic properties that