

Fatality Narrative

Worker Falls 65 Feet from Scaffold*

Industry: Water storage tank construction

Occupation: Welder

Task: Welding together sections of large water storage tank

Type of Incident: Fall from elevation

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On May 13, 2002 a construction welder was fatally injured when he fell 65 feet after his support scaffold failed. The victim was a 59-year-old male and a member of the Boilermaker's Union. He was welding inside a metal water storage tank with other members of his crew. The workers were using a horizontal welder, which is a machine on wheels that is designed to travel along the lip of the tank welding the seams of 8' by 22' sections of sheet metal. The operator sits on a seat attached to the machine as it travels around the tank. The operator had left the machine to do something else. The victim (a co-worker) got on the machine to move it. When he was done, he stepped off the machine and on to the scaffold to go back to his regular work area. The horizontal welder was still in motion. It's bottom wheels struck something in its path causing the top wheels to raise off the lip of the tank. The victim ran back to try and stop the machine. Before he could do this, the machine fell off the lip of the tank and tore out 20 feet of the scaffold. The victim, scaffolding and the 2000-pound welding machine fell to the ground.

Requirements/Recommendations

(! Indicates items required by law)

- ! Never leave the machine moving without an operator at the controls.
- Ensure the sensors that detect obstructions in the travel path are in good working order. Retrofit older machines with these sensors.
- Check for obstructions along the travel path prior to operation of the horizontal welder.
- ! Train all workers who may be required to operate equipment.
- Design or retrofit equipment to have backup safety systems in case the primary one fails.

State Wide Statistics: This was the 28th work-related fatality in Washington State during the year 2002 and was the 5th construction fatality of the year.

** This bulletin was developed at the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries to alert employers and employees in a timely manner of a tragic loss of life of a worker in Washington State. We encourage you to consider the above information as you make safety decisions for or recommendations to your company or constituency. The information in this notice is based on preliminary data ONLY and does not represent final determinations regarding the nature of the incident or conclusions regarding the cause of the fatality.*

Developed by the Washington State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) and Washington Industrial Safety and Health Act (WISHA) Programs at the WA State Dept. of Labor & Industries. For more information, contact the Safety and Health Assessment and Research for Prevention (SHARP) Program, 1-888-667-4277, <http://www.lni.wa.gov/sharp/face>.