WASHINGTON State FACE Program
Fatality Assessment & Control Evaluation

TRUCKING FATALITY NARRATIVE

INCIDENT FACTS

REPORT #:
71-254-2024

REPORT DATE:
June 1, 2024

INCIDENT DATE:
January 19, 2023

WORKER:
61 years old

INDUSTRY:
General freight trucking

OCCUPATION:
Semi-Truck Driver

SCENE:
Motor carrier terminal yard

EVENT TYPE:
Carbon monoxide poisoning

Carbon monoxide hazard warning on butane cooking stove canister found in truck.

For a slideshow version, click here.

Truck Driver Poisoned by Carbon Monoxide in Cab

SUMMARY

A 61-year-old truck driver died from carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning after a long rest break in his truck. He worked for his employer, a general freight carrier, for five months. The driver parked his truck at his employer's terminal yard for about 24 hours and slept overnight in the truck's sleeper berth. He was waiting for his next dispatch.

Around 9:30 a.m., he walked from his truck to the main terminal building. Another driver saw him struggling to open a door to the employee restroom and shower area. The driver helped him with the door but saw he was disoriented and having difficulty breathing, walking, and standing. The driver asked if he needed medical help, to which he nodded yes. The driver who came to assist then went to tell management about the emergency.

Truck from incident.

After calling 911, a manager and the driver returned to the restroom, but the ill driver had locked himself inside and refused to leave. After a few minutes, the driver agreed to open the door and go with them to the employee lounge. He complained of a headache and back pain, had very pale skin with flushed cheeks, and was sweating and struggling to breathe. First responders arrived and took him to the hospital, but he died shortly after. A toxicology report concluded the driver died from CO poisoning.

Following the incident, investigators found:

- The driver was most likely poisoned by CO from a single-burner butane cooking stove found in the truck.
- The sleeper had a bunk heater with a small diesel-powered blower motor. Air monitoring in the sleeper and near the heater's exhaust while it was running did not show any significant amount of CO.
- No exhaust leaks were detected in the truck's engine or undercarriage area.

REQUIREMENTS

Employers must:

- Make sure a commercial motor vehicle is not used when an occupant has been affected by CO; where CO has been detected inside the vehicle; or when a mechanical condition is discovered which would be likely to produce CO hazard exposure to vehicle occupants. See 49 CFR 392.66

RECOMMENDATIONS

FACE investigators concluded that, to help prevent similar occurrences, employers should:

- Install battery-powered CO detector alarms in truck cabs and sleeper berths. Use only detectors made for vehicles. Always follow the detector manufacturer's installation, maintenance, and safety instructions.
- Develop and enforce clearly written accident prevention program (APP) policies for CO poisoning prevention. Policies should:
  - Prohibit use of butane, propane, and other fuel-burning cooking stoves and space heaters inside cabs, sleepers, and trailers. Fuel canisters can produce CO, a colorless, odorless, and tasteless toxic gas that can quickly, and without warning, cause brain and heart damage, unconsciousness, and suffocation.
  - Require drivers whose CO alarm has activated to park and exit their truck immediately, get into fresh air, and have a repair shop tow and check their truck for CO leaks. Call 911 if the driver feels poisoned.
  - Instruct drivers to avoid idling or parking near other trucks that are idling or using auxiliary power units (APUs) producing exhaust fumes. Such fumes can enter a truck even if windows and vents are closed.
- Train and evaluate drivers' knowledge about CO hazards, exposure sources, prevention methods, detector alarms, poisoning symptoms, and emergency responses. Conduct periodic refresher training.
- Perform regularly scheduled preventive maintenance checks and services on engine and bunk heater exhaust systems to ensure CO leaks are detected and repaired before the truck is returned to service.

RESOURCES

Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Fact Sheet – OSHA

SHARP Safety & Health Assessment & Research for Prevention

Washington State Department of Labor & Industries

This narrative was developed to alert employers and workers of a tragic incident and is based on preliminary data ONLY and does not represent final determinations regarding the nature of the incident or the cause of the injury. Developed by WA State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program and the Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), WA State Dept. of Labor & Industries. The FACE Program is supported in part by a grant from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH grant# 5U60OH008487). For more information visit www.lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-research/ongoing-projects/work-related-fatalities-face.