Airport Worker Killed By Moving Vehicle



INCIDENT

In the pre-dawn hours of February 21st 2014, Cesar Augusto Valenzuela, 51, was driving a luggage cart on a service road at Los Angeles International Airport, commonly known as LAX. Valenzuela was apparently thrown from the cart he was driving and struck by another vehicle. He did not survive the collision.

NEED TO KNOW

A worker was killed in 2006 in Los Angeles International Airport (LAX). A strike occurred at LAX in 2012 over the issues of health and safety risks in the job. Then the death of Cesar Augusto Valenzuela in 2014 while he was working at LAX.

BUSINESS / REGULATIONS

Valenzuela worked for Menzies Aviation USA Inc., a company that contracts baggage handling and other services to major airlines. In 2013, Menzies was fined nearly $95,000 by Cal/OSHA for serious safety violations, including failure to meet standards for operation of power vehicles.

Workers at the company have been advocating for safer working conditions for several years. More than 100 workers went on strike in 2012 due to “concerns about the serious health and safety risks they faced on the job,” reports United Service Workers West, a division of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

Valenzuela’s death was not the first fatality at Menzies Aviation’s LAX operations. In 2006, a worker was killed at the airport after being struck by a warehouse transport vehicle.

Following this most recent incident, California legislators called for an investigation into safety conditions in the airline industry. “This is a horrible tragedy and we must find out if this could have been prevented,” said state Sen. Ted Lieu, whose district includes LAX. “But we need to have hearings on airports statewide to see if there is a systematic problem.”

“Course Correction,” a study published in November 2013 by the University of California, Berkeley Center for Labor Research found that a decades-long trend of outsourcing airline industry jobs to third-party contractors – such as Menzies Aviation – has caused a steady erosion in wages and working standards for airport workers. According to the report’s executive summary:

The transformation of self-sustaining middle-class airline careers to low-wage outsourced jobs not only hurts workers and their communities, but also may negatively affect the safety, security, and efficiency of airports.

Workers rallied at LAX on March 6, protesting “lax enforcement of safety standards” by airport contractors, reported EFE, the Spanish language news agency.

Family members, friends and co-workers held a vigil in Valenzuela’s honor on February 25th.

His widow, Ulvita Ramirez told KCAL-TV that her husband had been in good health at the time of the incident. But after 17 years as an airport worker, she said, Valenzuela had grown concerned about safety conditions on the job.

STATISTICS

Transportation incidents, such as the event that claimed the life of Cesar Valenzuela, accounted for 41 percent of all workplace deaths in 2012, the most recent year for which data is available.

PREVENTION

We know that employer is required under law to provide a safe way environment for workers. There is no one “panacea” to avoid workplace injuries and facilities. Vigilance and awareness of hazards and dangers in the workplace is the first step towards “preventing” accidents. A safe workplace is the result of cooperation between employees and employers.

To prevent injuries and death the following must be implemented:

- Provide workers training on hazard awareness.
- Conduct periodic safety inspections.
- Implement safety measures.
- Instill a mentality of vigilance in the mindset of the workplace.