Diver Trapped in Pipe



Lester L. Woda, an orchard manager, drowned in Okanogan, WA, after becoming trapped in a reservoir pipe.

Woda had entered the 50-foot-long pipe to perform work. He had first tried to drain the pipe, but the flow of water coming in was described as being “like a waterfall”, making work impossible. Abandoning that approach, he took a scuba tank and entered the pipe again. The pipe was only 30 inches (66 cm) across, so he supported the tank above his head to allow himself to work below.

While he was working on the bottom, a butterfly valve closed on his foot, triggered by water pressure. Trapped at the bottom of the pipe, Woda tugged his safety rope, but workmates at the surface couldn’t free him. He ran out of air before rescuers arrived. Removing his body took 50 rescuers nine hours.

There were other options, less dangerous, that could have been employed here. Deliberately placing yourself in an unbreathable atmosphere, in an awkward position, and in a confined space is stacking three enormous risks on top of one another. Learn to recognize work hazards and avoid them.

Source: The Spokesman-Review, Spokane, Washington, July 19, 2006