Oil Field Worker Killed By Toxic Fumes



INCIDENT

Fabian Martinez of Hobbs, New Mexico, died on July 30, 2014. He was working in an oilfield pit in nearby Artesia, cutting pipe and capping lines, when there was an explosion. His three co-workers managed to escape, but Fabian was pinned by the pipe, and succumbed to hydrogen sulfide gas.

NEED TO KNOW

In the hierarchy of oil field work, it is the youngest workers who get assigned the most dangerous jobs. Fabian was only 21 – too young to be exposed to dangerous hazards and too young to die.

BUSINESS / REGULATIONS

Workers in this industry are exposed to great risks to keep our homes and businesses supplied with reliable energy, yet they seen invisible.

In fact, the Governor of North Dakota opined that the oil industry is among the most dangerous industries in the U.S.A.

OSHA did pursue an investigation, finding Fabian's employer – Diversified Oil Field Services – guilty of eight serious safety violations, fining the company $28,000.

Such fines, however, are not sufficient to rein in the hazards common in this deadly industry. A drop-in oil prices has prompted widespread cost cutting, which lowered the level and adequate protection of workers.

OSHA is only required to investigate accidents that are fatal and/or require hospitalization, many unsafe practices continue until irrevocable tragedies occur.

You will find no obituary for Fabian. No memorial. No remembrances on Facebook. After the initial reports of the accident on local New Mexico TV and in the press, there was no follow-up. Fabian was too young to make his mark when he died young.

Indeed, TV reporters found that Fabian's employer "held a series of safety meetings" … the day *after* he died.

STATISTICS

The Wall Street Journal documents 38 oil field deaths in from October through February in 2015/14.

The Houston Chronicle also has reveling statistics. The paper documents, on a nation-wide basis 663 workers in oil field – related industries were reported killed in the drilling and fracking boom from 2007 to 2012.

PREVENTION

It is not difficult to come up with ways to prevent injury and death even in the macho and rough and tumble mantra in oil field work.

OSHA’s Hazard alert on hydrogen sulfide encapsulates three best practices, such as.

- Active monitoring for hydrogen – sulfide gas
- Good planning
- Training programs

It sounds simple. But the test is the willingness of the industry to buy into the oil program. Cost – cutting in times of low oil prices often interjects resulting in few training and less effective safety programs.

OSHA, in its own right, plays a key role to keep the oil – industry accountable through rigorous safety protocols.