Chemical Storage Is A Matter Of Safety And Common Sense Fatality File



Man Killed in Chemical Storage Tank

A contractor hired to clean a chemical storage tank in Wheeling was found dead at the bottom of the structure at the Sunnyside Corporation on Thursday.

“I don’t know if he may have fallen or if he may have just been overcome by the fumes, but again it is an immediately dangerous to life and health environment inside that tank,” Wheeling Fire Chief Keith MacIsaac told reporters.

MacIsaac said the tank was an “oxygen-deficient atmosphere” and that the worker, who is believed to be in his 30s, was not wearing the proper equipment needed to deal with the chemicals.

Emergency personnel who responded to the facility required decontamination treatment because of possible exposure to dangerous chemicals.

The 6,000 gallon tank, which measures 50 feet high by 28 feet wide, had methylene chloride at the bottom, MacIsaac said.

Methylene chloride, also called dichloromethane, is a volatile, colorless liquid with a chloroform-like odor, according to the United States Department of Labor. It’s used in various industrial processes in many different industries: paint stripping, pharmaceutical manufacturing, paint remover manufacturing, metal cleaning and degreasing, adhesives manufacturing and use, polyurethane foam production, film base manufacturing, polycarbonate resin production, and solvent distribution and formulation.

Sunnyside makes paint thinner, cleaners and other chemical solvents and removers, according to its website.

The man’s name has not been publicly released. OSHA is investigating.