Compressed Air & Pneumatics: Hidden Blast and Impact Hazards Fatality File



Construction Fatality Investigation, Case 324

What Happened

A 33-year-old carpenter died from head injuries after a pneumatic framing nail gun discharged unexpectedly during a house framing job. He was reattaching an entry wall in an awkward position, holding the nail gun with his non-dominant hand pointed back toward his own body, with no eye protection or hard hat. The gun's factory sequential trigger had been swapped for a contact trigger, which fires any time the tip is pressed. The tool struck a wall stud and discharged unintentionally, sending a nail into his eye socket. He collapsed shortly after telling coworkers to call for help and died days later in the hospital.

What Went Wrong

The safer sequential trigger had been deliberately replaced with a contact trigger, doubling the risk of unintended discharge. No eye protection or hard hat was worn. No accident prevention program, training, or PPE enforcement existed at the worksite. The same employer had been cited for identical violations at a different location back in 2010 — and the conditions were never corrected. MIOSHA issued Serious, Repeat Serious, and Regulatory citations following the investigation.

The Bottom Line

A safety feature was removed from the tool. A worker stood in the line of fire with no protection. No training or oversight caught it in time. Pneumatic tools are high-energy systems — every modification, missed PPE step, or skipped safety procedure can be the one that costs a life.

Source: https://oem.msu.edu