Contractor & Sub-Safety: Integrating External Workers Safely Fatality File



Two Contractors Killed After Entering Oxygen-Deficient Sewer Manhole Without Required Safety Controls

Two contracted workers from Belt Construction Inc. died after entering a newly installed sewer manhole at a project site in Edmond, Oklahoma without proper confined-space planning or atmospheric testing. The first worker descended approximately 20 feet below ground to conduct testing and immediately lost consciousness due to an oxygen-deficient atmosphere. A second contractor entered the manhole in an attempted rescue and also lost consciousness. Both workers later died from their injuries.

OSHA’s investigation found that the contractor failed to perform required confined-space evaluations, including oxygen level testing and determination of ventilation needs. The company did not provide rescue equipment, did not train workers on confined-space entry requirements, and did not obtain the necessary entry permits mandated by federal law. The lack of coordination between the contractor and the host site meant that critical hazard controls, rescue procedures, and responsibilities were never communicated or enforced. OSHA cited the company for multiple serious and willful violations and proposed $287,150 in penalties.

This incident demonstrates the life-and-death importance of properly integrating contractors and subcontractors into site-specific safety systems—ensuring they understand confined-space hazards, receive training, follow written procedures, and coordinate with the host employer before starting high-risk tasks.

Source: Osha.gov