Getting the Proper Emergency Equipment Fatality File



Worker Killed From Methane Explosion

A 58-year-old coal miner died from injuries he sustained during an explosion of methane gas. He was working above ground at the time of the incident. The explosion took place underground, in a 753-foot-deep shaft.

The victim was standing on expanded metal grating which covered the opening of the shaft. He and another employee were working to repair loose guarding on a pump that feeds down into the shaft. The second worker had just stepped off the grating to grab a tool when the incident occurred.

He remembers hearing a noise, loud like a jet engine, coming from inside the shaft. He yelled for his co-worker, the victim, to run. But he was standing in the direct line of fire. He was still on the grating of the shaft cover.

The noise that the witness heard was a methane explosion, traveling upward and out of the shaft. After an investigation, it was determined that the explosion took place because sparks and slag from their welding work had fallen into the shaft. They then made contact with excessive levels of methane.

The methane ignited and created an intense fire and explosion. The victim received first aid on site, was evacuated via helicopter, and died at the hospital several days later.

The report does not specify what type of clothing the victim was wearing. Flame-resistant materials may have protected him some. But, his death was attributed to “internal burns.” It’s also reported that he received burns and lacerations to his face.

There are, however, different kinds of PPE and safety equipment that could have prevented this incident. In this particular case, the presence of methane was a known potential. And even though the area was abundant with “no smoke or open flame” signs, nothing was done to prevent sparks from falling down into the shaft. **Welding blankets would have prevented that. A gas monitor could have been used as well, to detect the presence of methane.**