Mixer Strikes Ladder in Vat



A foreman placed a wooden ladder into a mixing vat that had recently been sprayed with a cleanser called methylene chloride.

While on the ladder, he called over to a co-worker to start the fan in the vat. This co-worker was not familiar with the equipment and started the mixer rather than the fan. The mixing blades struck the ladder, on which the foreman was standing, knocking him into the vat.

The co-worker put on a respirator mask and entered the vat to help the foreman. His mask was not designed for methylene chloride and soon the laborer became quite dizzy (self-contained breathing apparatus is recommended). He called for help to some of the other staff just before he fell unconscious.

A third person contacted emergency services and then began to enter the vat, using an air hose to try to combat the fumes. He himself became dizzy but was able to climb out just as help arrived.

The rescue team was equipped with self-contained respirator units, which enabled them to enter the vat and rescue the foreman and his co-worker. Both men were taken to the hospital where the laborer recovered. However, the foreman was declared brain dead two days later. The autopsy blamed death on inhalation of chemical fumes.

A death like this one could have been prevented if the foreman had only implemented and followed routine lock and tag procedures.

The coroner’s report commented on the lack of safety training that this firm gave its employees. It is likely that if these topics were covered on a regular basis at safety meetings and training sessions, this accident would not have occurred. All employees should be fully aware of the safety rules laid out regarding the shutdown, lockout and isolation of all equipment that is to be serviced within their work area.

Does your jobsite have adequate rescue equipment (and properly trained individuals) that would allow you to save a life in an emergency like this one?

This particular plant was located outside of a 911 area. Are your emergency phone numbers posted where they can easily be found in a panic situation?

For every foreman that is contemplating putting off a safety meeting or taking a shortcut around an equipment inspection: Think again. Someone’s life really is a high price to pay for ignoring safety procedures. That life could be your own.