Shared Economy and Gig Workers: Safety Beyond Traditional Employment Fatality File



Investigation into 41-year-old driver’s death finds two delivery services companies failed to protect workers transporting dry ice in Alabama

What Happened

On July 20, 2022, a 41-year-old delivery driver working for a subcontractor was found unresponsive in her parked delivery truck on the University of Birmingham campus in Alabama. She had arrived at her first stop shortly after 7:40 AM. Nearly two hours later, a passerby saw her slumped over, smashed the window, and called for help. She did not survive. Her truck contained 71 bags of dry ice in coolers that could not be fully closed. Carbon dioxide released from the dry ice in her enclosed cab had asphyxiated her.

What Went Wrong

OSHA found that the delivery subcontractor had implemented no procedures for transporting dry ice and had not trained employees on the chemical hazards they were routinely carrying. No one told this driver what was in the coolers, what gas it releases in an enclosed space, or how to protect herself. She drove into her workday with a lethal hazard in her vehicle and no knowledge it was there. Both the subcontractor and the coordinating company were cited for serious violations.

The Bottom Line

This driver was working alone, without safety training, without hazard information, and without anyone checking on her during her route. Independent contractor classification did not protect her from the hazard in her vehicle — it simply meant no one was required to tell her about it. Gig and contract workers carry the same hazards as employees and deserve the same information, training, and protection before they begin work.

Source: *Dol.gov*