Temporary Young Worker Pulled Into Mixer



INCIDENT

David Eleidjian, a 26-year-old Marine and Iraq War veteran, was mixing industrial adhesive last April at his new job at the Henkel Corporation, a manufacturing plant in Bay Point. Eleidjian was a temporary worker, hired through a staffing agency. He was assigned to use a 55-gallon mixer instead of the manufacturer-recommended 300-gallon mixer.

He was instructed to scrape adhesive from the mixing equipment that was just 12 inches from an unguarded shaft spinning at up to 350 rotations per minute. The coveralls he had been provided were too big, and the sleeves hung loose on his arms.

When one of his sleeves caught on the exposed rotating shaft, he was pulled into the mixer and crushed. He was rushed to a hospital, where he died from his injuries.

NEED TO KNOW

Workers between the ages of 15 and 24 are the largest percentage of part-time, temporary, contract, casual and seasonal workforces. They’re a tremendous asset to many organizations, tackling jobs with energy and enthusiasm. Unfortunately, though, these workers also face unique and substantial risks for work-related illnesses and injuries.

It’s not necessarily the age of young workers or temp worker that puts them at risk of workplace injury. They’re at risk because of their inexperience. Many hesitate to ask questions and many don’t recognize workplace dangers. If a young worker isn’t certain how to perform a task safely, they may try to reason it out without asking for help.

BUSINESS / REGULATIONS

For a century new worker are at an increased risk for occupational injury and fatality. That higher risk is due to a lack of safety training and experience at that worksite.

Just a few decades ago, temporary work was relatively rare and concentrated in white-collar professions.

But in recent years their numbers have grown dramatically, and temporary workers are now commonplace in virtually every type of workplace.

Securing temporary workers often lowers costs (the temporary workers are paid as much as 30 percent less than permanent workers) and increases flexibility by enabling host employers to increase their workforce without making a long-term hiring commitment.

As the economy picks up steam, these numbers are rising again, and more employers are filling jobs with temporary workers. As their numbers grow, many more will be injured or killed.

Why is this happening? Many employers decide to forego important safety training for their temporary employees that would normally be given to permanent employees.

They bring in “temps” for a few days, weeks or even months, and the employer’s commitment to these workers’ safety mirrors that “temp” status.

The reason? Employers hire temps to save money. Safety training is a cost of doing business, so some employers just skip it or erroneously assume that the staffing agency has conducted the training – gambling not only with their own bottom lines, but with the lives of these men and women who want nothing but to do an honest day’s work and come home safely to their families at the end of the day.

As the number of temporary workers rises, is it inevitable that injuries and fatalities will rise as well.

Workers are getting hurt and we know how to stop it. The Occupational Safety and Health Act is very clear.

Staffing agencies and their client employers who host temporary workers share the legal obligation to provide workplaces free of recognized hazards.

This includes providing required safety training in a language and vocabulary workers can understand.

Cutting corners on safety can result in both terrible tragedy and stiff OSHA penalties. Following the investigation into David Eleidjian’s death, Cal/OSHA fined the employer $200,000.00 of fatal injuries.

OSHA has embarked on a national initiative to protect temporary workers in order to halt this rising toll of fatal.

OSHA inspectors will determine, in every inspection, if every temporary worker on the site has received the safety training and protections required by law for the job.

Labor staffing agencies, must insist that their employees are not put at risk of injury or death while working at a client employer’s worksite.

And finally, every worker in the country must understand that they have the right to safe workplaces, and all workers, including temporary workers, have the right to contact OSHA, if they face workplace hazards.

Perhaps, Eleidjian thought he should overlook the signs of danger because he trusted that his supervisor would never assign him a life-threatening task.

This would have been a reasonable assumption for a Marine, who had learned to trust fellow Marines with his life.

No penalty will bring Eleidjian back to his mother, his stepfather, or his 3-year-old daughter, but perhaps that the penalty will cause other employers to think twice before they try to dodge safety laws.

STATISTICS

According to the American Staffing Association there were almost 3 million temporary workers in the nation's workforce with many doing highly hazardous construction and manufacturing work in 2013.

Over the last year, the U.S Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health administration received many reports of temporary workers killed on the job. Some were on the first few days at work.

Historically, in 2008, more than 139,000 American youth between the ages of 14 and 24 were injured at work; 436 died. Every year in Canada, more than 48,000 young workers are injured seriously enough to require time off from work. Also, in 2007, 38 young Canadian workers died from work-related injuries.

PREVENTION

When it comes to safety, knowledge is power. Young, new and temporary workers should be encouraged to ask questions about workplace safety, even if they feel they're asking something that might be obvious.

Before tackling a new job, be sure to get answers to these questions.

1. What are the hazards of this job?
2. Will I be working with equipment or machinery that could put me at risk for injury?
3. What safety training will I receive?
4. Will I need personal protective equipment (PPE)? If so, will it be provided to me or must I purchase it?
5. What's the company's fire safety program?
6. What do I do if I find myself in a violent situation?
7. Who should I talk to if I don't understand how to perform one of my job's tasks?
8. How do I recognize and report unsafe conditions?
9. What do I do if I'm injured on the job?
10. What's my role in the company's safety program?

A safe workplace is a team effort. If you're an experienced worker, speak up if you observe young workers committing unsafe acts or failing to wear appropriate PPE. If it appears that your young coworker has not received adequate training or hasn't understood it, tell a supervisor. And set a good example. Show new workers the right way to perform a job: The safe way.