Working Alone: Isolation, Emergency Response and Check-In Systems Fatality File

Worker Found Deceased Inside Water Tank of a Steam Truck (Alberta, Canada – February 19, 2022)

Summary of Incident

On February 19, 2022, a worker in Alberta's mining and petroleum development sector was found deceased inside the water supply tank of a steam truck. The worker had been performing maintenance or inspection-related duties alone. Because no coworker was present and no working check-in system was in place at the moment of the incident, the worker's absence was not detected in time to attempt a rescue.

Investigation

Alberta Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) opened a worksite fatality investigation under file F-OHS-269391. The investigation examined hazard assessment, working-alone procedures, confined-space entry controls, and emergency response. The case was referred for enforcement action review to determine prosecution under Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety Act.

Key Hazards Demonstrated by the Incident

The case reflects three patterns NIOSH and Canadian OHS regulators repeatedly cite in lone-worker fatalities. First, confined-space entry alone – even briefly – leaves no one available to recognize distress, sound an alarm, or perform rescue. Second, the absence of a verified two-way check-in system delayed discovery beyond the survival window. Third, lone-worker hazard assessments in remote and resource-sector sites often underestimate the time required for emergency response to reach the location.

Takeaways

Never enter a confined space alone, regardless of how routine the task feels. Establish a check-in schedule with verified two-way confirmation and a

documented escalation procedure if a check-in is missed. Conduct a written hazard assessment for every lone-worker task and update it whenever conditions change. Equip lone workers with a reliable communication device, backup power, and a panic/SOS function appropriate to the site.

Sources: https://open.alberta.ca