Young Oil Field Worker Killed by Hydrogen Sulfide

INCIDENT

Mr. Provancher on October 9th, 2012 with a co-worker Eric Williams, were replacing pipes at an oil pumping location in Dunn County, North Dakota. One of the pipes burst, releasing a cloud of hydrogen sulfide, a highly toxic colorless gas which carries a distinctive “rotten egg” odder.

Hight concentrations of the gas, according to an OSHA fact sheet, “can cause shock, convulsions, inability to breathe, extremely rapid unconsciousness, coma and death. Effects can occur within a few breaths, and possibly a single breath.”

Williams, who himself was hit with a heavy dose of the gas, ran from the building, but returned when he saw that Provancher was still inside and dragged him out of the building. Williams attempted CPR on his co- worker until an ambulance arrived.

Provancher was taken by ambulance to St. Joseph’s Hospital in Dickinson, North Dakota. He died two days later, on October 11th.

NEED TO KNOW

At the age of 25, Ryan Provancher was a 7-yr. veteran in the booming oil fields in North Dakota. But a broken pipe, a cloud of hydrogen sulfide, caused the death of Mr. Provancher from toxic exposure.

BUSINESS / REGULATIONS

The incident is under investigation by OSHA, although the agency was unable to send an investigator to the scene until nearly a week after it took place. A government shutdown was in effect at the time, and a federal worker had to be called back from furlough to carry out an inspection.

This veteran worker at the age of 25 could not make a further mark in life for an accident that could have been prevented. But in the end, he could not outlive his grandparents, parents, two brothers, two sisters and a girlfriend. He was cremated October 15 / 12.

STATISTICS

Oil and gas extraction have become the most dangerous industry in America, according to 2012 data from the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics. Deaths in the industry jumped by 23 percent in 2012, to 138 deaths from 112 in 2011. The 2012 figure is the highest number of deaths recorded in oil and gas extraction since BLS began the current Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries in 2003. The figure is based on preliminary data and is likely to become higher when final figures are released.

The oil and gas extraction industry now have a fatality rate of 24.2 deaths for every 100,000 full-time workers –higher than any other industry. The overall rate of fatalities in the United States is 3.2 deaths per 100,000 workers.

PREVENTION

It is not difficult to come up with ways to prevent injury and death even in the macho and rough and tumble mantra of oil field work.

OSHS’s Hazard alert on hydrogen sulfide encapsulates three best practices, such as:

- active monitoring for hydrogen sulfide gas.
- good planning
- training programs