Argon Gas Kills Three at Cosmetics Factory

Argon gas, used in welding, is not toxic but that doesn’t mean it can’t kill. Why? Argon gas can displace oxygen, potentially asphyxiating workers when used in confined spaces.

A 35-year-old mother of three died after trying to rescue two subcontractors who fell unconscious while attempting to weld a metal tank at a cosmetics factory in Lac Brome, QC, about 60 miles (100 kilometers) southeast of Montreal.

A 30-year-old subcontractor was overcome while he was welding inside a metal tank at the Emballages Knowlton plant. Another subcontractor, aged 55, tried to help his coworker and also passed out.

Nancy Desnoyers, an Emballages Knowlton worker who had been trained in first aid, tried to rescue the downed men and she, too, was overcome by the gas.

Desnoyers’ sister, Tammy, said it was in Nancy’s nature to want to help people and it’s not surprising she would risk her life to do so. Tammy described her sister as being popular and having many friends at the plant, where she worked as an assembly line operator.

A government safety official in Quebec said it appeared the subcontractors lacked necessary equipment that would have kept them safe in a confined space.