Ball Bearing Shatters Fatality-Free Status

A West Virginia company that had not experienced a worker fatality since April 1996 lost a long-time employee in late May 2007 after a ball bearing shot out of a valve and pierced the worker’s side.

Maintenance worker Roger Lee Stephens, a 57- year-old married father of four children, had been employed at Special Metals Corporation in Huntington, WV, since 1992. Another worker who had been helping him escaped injury.

Stephens was servicing a hydraulic bearing cap puller when a ball bearing was suddenly ejected at high velocity. A company spokeswoman said Special Metals has a low injury rate and described the incident as an “extraordinary situation.”

The Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) is investigating the cause of the fatality and the company is also conducting its own investigation.

Stephens, of Wayne, WV, was a member of the Emergency Response Team. He also was a member and deacon of Canada Chapel in Wayne.