

Employee Dies During Unauthorized Entry

An employee who was hired as a sweeper and handyman was discovered sitting in a deposit of blue sludge, on the bottom of a deep steel vat. The man had, in the past, cleaned tanks with other workers, but there was no reason for his being inside the container at this time.

The deceased man was removed with some difficulty because there were no records of what substance was actually in the tank. An analysis had to be done quickly. It was discovered that the vat contained deadly hydrogen cyanide gas, so proper respiratory protection had to be found for the rescuers.

Then the mask that the rescuer tried to use proved to be faulty. It was not properly maintained and the valves were stuck. When the worker was finally removed from the tank, CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) was started and continued until he was under medical care. Unfortunately, he did not revive.

Several things may have prevented the death of this employee. The vat or tank should have been protected in such a way as to prevent casual entry by an untrained worker. Confined space entry procedures and regular safety training sessions would have warned him about the dangers of entering a hazardous area. The proper, well-maintained equipment would have sped up his rescue from the vat. But most importantly, he should not have entered the vat without being instructed to do so and without the proper protective equipment.