

HDPE Pipe Welding Fatality File

NAPA / Welding accident kills worker / Man burns to death inside pipe after torch ignites clothes.

A construction worker was killed Wednesday when a welding torch apparently ignited his clothes while he was working inside a steel drainage pipe at a construction site at Highway 29 in Napa.

The man, whose name was not released, was trapped inside the pipe, and burned to death, according to the Napa Fire Department.

The worker had entered the pipe to perform either welding or cutting with an acetylene torch. The pipe was 24 inches in diameter, and the man was about 40 feet inside the pipe when the fire broke out.

The man cried out in pain, and his partner, who also was not identified, attempted to go to his rescue with a fire extinguisher. However, it turned out the second man could not be of help, according to fire Capt. Scott Sedgley.

"You can crawl in the pipe, but you can't turn around," Sedgley said. Realizing the situation was desperate, the trapped man's partner backed out of the pipe and called 911.

The Napa Fire Department was on the scene in four minutes, but it took time to figure out how to get to the man, who was trapped in the pipe under Highway 29. The firefighters rigged up three long wooden poles carried on the fire engine and attached a hook. When they pulled the man out, he was dead.

"Any industrial accident is bad," Sedgley said. "They happen to good people, out there trying to earn a living."

The steel pipe was intended as a storm drain for a new development at Atrium Parkway and South Jefferson Street.