Hydrogen Sulfide Causes Fall Into Tank

An employee of a natural gas well service company was knocked unconscious by hydrogen sulfide gas. He fell into a water tank and drowned. He had been trying to get a sample of the liquid produced by a swab removing water from the gas well. Ordinarily this test is done by using a spout on the water tank, but the spout was frozen shut. Instead of removing the spout from the flow line, steaming it open and reinstalling it, the worker took a common shortcut. His body was found in the tank, and it appears he fell from either the wall of the tank or a catwalk above it.

Hydrogen sulfide is a deadly gas associated with gas and oil production and other industries. By the time a victim realizes he has been exposed to hydrogen sulfide, it is often too late. Taking shortcuts while working in such hazardous environments can be fatal. Investigation of this accident also showed the victim had been using marijuana and could have been significantly impaired at the time of this incident. Investigators also pointed out the importance of the safety meeting on a job such as this when the crew could have been reminded of the possibility of hydrogen sulfide gas and the need for protective breathing equipment.