Irrigation Safety Fatality File

‘He drowned right before their eyes’: California father-of-two, 41, dies after he’s sucked under water by a large pipe used for crops

- Carlos Tovar, a father-of-two, died when he was sucked under water in a California river by a large irrigation pipe used to pump water to crops
- Police said Tovar was untangling a ski line when the pipe sucked him under
- An attorney for his wife and kids said they want to find who the pipe belongs to
- A GoFundMe for funeral and living expenses has raised more than $50,000

A California family wants answers after a father-of-two drowned in a freak accident when he was sucked under water by a large irrigation pipe used for crops.

Carlos Tovar, 41, was untangling a ski line in the Delta in San Joaquin County last week when he was sucked under, police said. His friends tried desperately to untangle him and pull him back on board their boat but could not free him.

‘He drowned right before their eyes despite their efforts,’ the family’s attorney, Douglas Saeltzer, told CBS13.

‘Now a wonderful man is dead. He apparently got caught in an irrigation pipe running water out of the Delta.’

Authorities said it appears that Tovar was held under water by a large pipe that juts out of the levee into the water. Investigators said the irrigation pipes are used to pump water to crops.

Sgt. Darren Epperson said it was the first time he’s heard of someone getting sucked under water by the pipe but warned other people to steer clear of them.

With the Fourth of July holiday here, he said he expects there to be a lot of people in the water.

‘You can see it’s an oddball man-made shape going up at an angle on the bank, so you know that’s a pipe and it doesn’t matter if the pipe is pushing water out or pulling it in,’ he told the outlet. ‘It’s a danger to you, either way, so you just need to stay away from it.’

The Tovar family has launched an independent investigation into the death. Their attorney said they want to find out who the pipe belongs to.

Locals in the area said the pipes are usually owned by individual farmers.

‘They’re going through a family’s worst nightmare, and they don’t want other families to go through what they’re going through,’ he said. ‘We have a responsibility to make sure that water is being pulled out of the Delta safely and responsibly.’

The friend of the family started a GoFundMe seeking donations for funeral costs and living expenses for Tovar’s wife, son and daughter. So far, more than $50,000 has been raised.