Job Experience No Excuse for Shortcuts

Could This Have Been You?

On average, 5,000 to 6,000 workers are killed each year. Learn from the following reports of real workplace fatalities to avoid a similar fate.

“He noticed the manhole was in the closed position but not bolted shut.”

No matter how experienced you are at your job, you should never let your guard down.

Tim Healey will always remember this as he recounts a well-known story about an experienced boiler inspector who died in a confined space. Healey, Director of Safety at the Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection & Insurance Company in Hartford, CT, hopes workers will learn from this tragic story.

The inspector had been doing boiler inspections for years and had received comprehensive training. He scheduled a routine job at a facility that he was very familiar with, but because of scheduling problems, the appointment, originally on a Friday, had to be postponed. Wanting to maintain good service for a long-time customer, the inspector arranged to come in on a Saturday to conduct the inspection.

The inspector arrived at the plant on Saturday – alone – with his safety gear and portable confined space atmosphere monitor. It is believed that he approached a steel cylinder with a manhole opening at the end. He noticed the manhole was in the closed position but not bolted shut. He apparently decided to “take a peek” in the steam drum to size up the work he had to do.

When he pushed open the manhole door and put his head inside, he apparently became light-headed and fell head first into the drum opening. His body was discovered the following Monday morning; his

head and upper body inside the opening.

The inspector didn’t know that the plant had injected nitrogen into the open boiler, which is a commonly used means to prevent corrosion. The inspector suffocated as a result of his actions.

Healey says you should never enter confined spaces alone, and never open or enter a confined space without knowing what is inside. “Despite years of training and experience, we place ourselves at risk when we choose to take shortcuts or ignore proven safe work practices.”