Maintenance Man Drawn Into Pipe

A maintenance worker died after being drawn into a 172-inchdiameter vacuum pipe at a paper processing plant.

The victim and two co-workers were attempting to replace a blower on a vacuum line that transported wood chips from the milling process into the paper plant.

The crew on the previous shift had prepared the re-placement blower for installation and moved it to the worksite. When the victim and his co-workers arrived at the site they were instructed to remove the faulty blower and install the replacement blower.

After the faulty blower was lifted out of position by a small crane, the victim attempted to walk past the unguarded 172-inch pipe when the vacuum suction pulled his chest against it. He called to his co-workers for help and both men grabbed him and tried to pull him away from the pipe; however, the victim was doubled over backwards and pulled through the pipe by the vacuum until he was stopped by the intake shroud of the next blower on the vacuum line.

Investigators concluded that, to prevent similar occurrences, employers should:

-Develop comprehensive, written energy control procedures for maintenance work that may result in employee exposure to hazardous energy.
-Conduct a job hazard analysis to identify potential hazards and implement appropriate control measures for these hazards.
-Encourage dialogue and discussion among rotating shift workers performing the same task so that all workers are familiar with the status of the work being performed.
-Designate a competent person to conduct periodic safety inspections.