Methane Kills Four Family Members

The dangers of trying to rescue others from a deadly atmosphere can’t be emphasized enough. A heart-breaking example occurred in Virginia earlier this summer, when four members of the same family and one other person died after being exposed to deadly methane and hydrogen sulfide gas at a dairy farm.

Scott Showalter, a 34-year-old Mennonite farmer, was attempting to unclog pipes in a manure pit when he was overcome by poisonous gas. A hired hand ran for help and the family rushed to help Scott. Tragically, Scott’s wife, Phyllis, 33, and two of their four daughters, Shayla, 11, and Christina, 9, all perished. The fifth victim was hired hand Amous Stoltzfus, 24.

Had a neighbor not held back the two youngest Showalter children, the death toll could have been higher. A medical examiner handling the case said cool weather and little wind probably allowed the gas concentrations to increase to even deadlier levels around the manure pit area.

The Showalters were well known in their community west of Harrisonburg, VA. Their neighbor, Sonny Leyman, who tried unsuccessfully to hook Phyllis Showalter’s arm with a bar, said the family was loving and caring. Others remarked how willing they were to help others, especially with farm work.