Nitrogen Gas Overcomes Two

Workers were preparing to fill a rail tanker car with canola oil for shipment. A hose fell into the car, and one worker climbed into the tanker to retrieve it. He was overcome by the nitrogen gas used to preserve the food oil. A second worker climbed into the tanker to see what had happened. Both died of brain damage from breathing in the nitrogen. A third worker went in to rescue the first two, and he was injured but survived.

In a similar incident, two workers were cleaning a large tank at a vegetable oil plant. They had used argon gas to purge the vessel. One worker died and the other was rescued. In both of these cases, confined space entry procedures should have been established and followed.

A mixture of air, including the right percentage of oxygen, is needed to sustain human life. Breathing in an inert gas such as those used to purge these vessels can quickly be fatal. Use all precautions for working in and around confined spaces such as these tanks. Never attempt to rescue anyone from a confined space unless you are trained, authorized and properly equipped with a supplied-air breathing apparatus.