

Poor fitting safety line fails to save man

Five feet of slack meant the difference between life and death for a California warehouse worker.

The man was working at a salt processing plant, cleaning the inside of a salt storage bin, when the surface gave way and he plunged 20 feet (about six meters) into an air pocket. The victim was wearing a safety lanyard. However, the line was slack and did not stop him before he plunged into salt and suffocated. A co-worker, equipped with a lanyard with less slack, fell only 15 feet (4.5 meters) and was restrained before he hit the salt pocket. He was pulled to safety and did not sustain serious injuries.

The two workers were provided with personal protective equipment, but they were not trained how to use it properly and were not wearing respirators. Workplace hazards were not identified and there was no rescue plan in place to deal with falls or entrapments.

This tragic accident illustrates how important it is to identify and avoid hazardous work environments and wear properly fitting safety equipment. If you must enter a confined space, follow your company's written safety procedures to ensure the air quality and the environment are both safe. Make sure other employees are aware of what you are doing and available to rescue you if needed.