Tugboat Slip Kills New Worker

A marina worker died of head injuries when a 30-ton tugboat slipped in a lifting harness. The victim had only been working at the British Columbia marina for a week. He was helping a mobile crane operator hoist the tug out of the water. The crane used for the job is called a “straddle hoist.” It lifts the boat in a pair of slings, allowing it to be moved onto land.

While setting blocks beneath the bow of the boat to support the hull, the victim moved around to the far side of the tug where the hoist operator couldn’t see him, close to the bow hoist sling and its heavy steel attachment pin. When the operator lowered the stern, the forward sling slipped along the hull. The metal pin struck the victim in the head, and he died of crushing injuries.

Equipment operators must stay in communication with, and preferably in sight of workers on the ground. If there are many workers, a single crewmember should be a designated contact. Operators and crewmembers must both understand the hand or other communication signals to be used. New workers are the most vulnerable of all. A new worker shouldn’t be exposed to hazards, especially the “routine” ones, without training and support from a more experienced worker. Make sure the newbies work closely with experienced workers. In the end, they’ll be better workers; and safer, too.

Source: Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety, Health & Safety Report Vol. 3, Issue 4, April 2005