Egg and Poultry Workers Safety Fatality File



Two Worker Deaths in January Show Need For Reforms in U.S. Poultry Slaughterhouses

SAN DIEGO – As the new year begins, families, friends, and co-workers are mourning the deaths of two poultry plant workers in Alabama and Georgia.

On Monday, January 6th, Gabriel Seth Brutley, 35, died at a JBS/Pilgrim's Pride plant in Guntersville, Alabama. He lost his life to a mechanical lift. The company is not releasing more details about this tragedy.

On Wednesday, January 15th, Chit Tuay, 38, died at a Fieldale Farms plant in Murrayville, Georgia. Tuay died while cleaning a scalder – a machine used in poultry processing – when he fell into the equipment and broke his neck.

"Neither of these tragic deaths was an 'accident,'" said Jessica Martinez, co-executive director of the National Council for Occupational Safety and Health (National COSH). "Poultry is a dangerous industry where workers face injury rates higher than the national average for all private industry. If proper safety protocols had been implemented – with the required safety equipment, the required training, and full worker involvement – these fatalities could have been prevented. Gabriel Brutley and Chit Tuay should be alive and with their families today."

Both the Fieldale Farms Murrayville plant and the JBS/Pilgrim's Pride Guntersville plant recently received special waivers from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) allowing them to increase line speeds from butchering 140 chickens per minute to 175 birds per minute. The waivers were granted by USDA despite an alarming record of recent preventable fractures, lacerations, amputations, and workplace fatalities at both facilities. This includes a dozen serious incidents in both plants since 2015, according to data compiled by the National Employment Law Project (NELP) and National COSH.

"When chicken slaughter plants increase the number of birds they kill per minute, production for every worker – including sanitation workers – ramps up as everyone works harder and faster to process and pack the product and sanitize equipment for the increase in output," said Debbie Berkowitz, worker health and safety program director at the National Employment Law Project. "This increases the likelihood of serious injuries among poultry workers, who are disproportionately people of color and immigrants. The USDA granted these special waivers despite strong opposition from

workers, public health advocates, and consumer groups.”

To prevent future tragedies, two national advocacy organizations – the National Council for Occupational Safety and Health (National COSH) and the National Employment Law Project (NELP) – called today for USDA to stop issuing waivers for increased line speeds. In addition, the groups said OSHA should conduct wall-to-wall safety inspections in the facilities where the fatalities occurred and increase full inspections throughout the industry.

The deaths of Brutley and Tuay took place over a period of just nine days in January. In 2018, the most recent year for which data is available, there were five worker deaths in the poultry industry during the entire year.

“Workers should never have to sacrifice their lives for a job,” said Berkowitz. “OSHA must do a thorough investigation and assure that these companies are held accountable for any violations of the law.”