Manure Pits Fatality File



Working on the manure pit’s mechanical agitator was not one of Jay Anderson’s favorite jobs, however it was necessary from time to time, and it was a job he had done many times. Today, as the July sun beat down on the parched ground, the 28-year-old, found himself entering the pit to replace a shear pin on the agitator shaft.

As he finished the job and started to climb out of the shaft, he was overcome by the toxic fumes and fell to the bottom of the 10-feet-deep pit. His 15-year-old nephew saw what had happened and quickly climbed down to rescue his uncle. Unaware of the potentially fatal fumes that had affected his uncle, he too was overcome and collapsed.

Realizing there was a problem, a 63-year-old cousin of Jay Anderson’s climbed into the pit to rescue the two. He was followed by Jay Anderson’s 37-year-old brother, and finally his 65-year-old father. Each entered the pit separately in an attempt to rescue the others. Each was overcome by the toxic fumes, which were more intense because of the heat, and collapsed.

Rescue workers arrived on the scene within 20 minutes of the last victim’s collapse. All five men died within six hours after exposure to the manure pit gases. Reports of the medical examiner cite methane gas asphyxiation for the cause of death for each of the victims.

Awareness of the dangers of manure pit gasses and adequate ventilation in the pit area could have prevented these tragic deaths.