

Company: Fatal Pennsylvania oven explosion caused by human error

Human error was to blame for an explosion that killed one worker and seriously injured another in Pennsylvania this year, according to the results of a company investigation released earlier this month.

The accident happened when an industrial oven exploded one morning in January at the St. Marys, Pennsylvania, site of an international manufacturing company. A 52-year-old research director who was visiting from another site was killed. A 58-year-old production manager was seriously injured in the blast.

The company says its internal investigation found that materials were incorrectly placed in a curing oven. It says the oven was otherwise safely operated. It did not say which materials and which people were involved in the error. The company has slowly started production in the area where the accident happened.

Meanwhile, federal regulators continue to investigate whether the company violated workplace safety laws during the industrial accident. It was the second fatal accident in recent years at the plant. In 2012, a 39-year-old man died in a forklift accident. The company was cited for failing to follow safety rules.

After a workplace accident, internal and government investigations can help determine what happened and whether the company should be held accountable for the death. These investigations can help make workplaces safer and prevent other people from being injured.

But the cause of the accident usually does not affect whether an employee is eligible for workers' compensation benefits. Pennsylvania workers' compensation laws entitle workers to benefits regardless of who was at fault for the accident.

Source: The Bradford Era, "Mersen USA: Misplaced materials caused fatal blast," □ Colin Deppen, April 3, 2014