

Sugar plant accident that killed temp worker could have been avoided

Temp jobs are a permanent part of the new normal in the U.S. economy. An increasing number of workers in Pennsylvania and other states are temporary workers, and with the increase has come new concerns about worker safety. A Pennsylvania accident recently highlighted in an [article](#) by the journalism group ProPublica shows some of the dangers these workers face.

The accident happened at a sugar plant in Fairless Hills, a community about 25 miles northeast of Philadelphia. A 50-year-old temporary worker and coworkers spent the morning bagging sugar from a large hopper. Sugar clumps clogged the hopper, which forced workers to climb inside and use shovels to help sugar flow from the hole at the bottom of the hopper.

Coworkers spotted the temp worker digging in the sugar, but the man was gone when they looked back. They noticed a shovel buried up to the handle, and saw the man's jeans through a gap at the bottom of the hopper. The man had been buried alive.

One of the most disturbing aspects of this accident: The temporary worker's death may have been preventable. A safety device could have stopped the man from being buried alive. In fact, the device had been in place until just 13 days before the accident. A manager had the device removed, believing that it slowed down production.

When the accident happened, every worker at the warehouse was a temp worker, including the warehouse manager. The company had previously been cited by the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) for failing to train temporary workers at a different plant.

The accident illustrates concerns OSHA had previously raised regarding temp worker safety. The agency said that some employers were using temp workers to avoid compliance obligations and that temp workers were more vulnerable to safety hazards and retaliation at work than traditional employees. OSHA also says that temporary workers often are not given appropriate safety training.

Given these concerns, it's not surprising that ProPublica and other organizations have found that temporary workers have a higher injury rate than other workers. All workers, whether temporary workers or permanent, traditional employees, have the right to be safe at work.

Source:

- Our law firm handles workers compensation claims for workers who have been injured or killed. For more information, see our page on warehouse accidents.