

Confined Spaces on the Farm Fatality File



Five Fatalities

On July 26, five farm workers died after consecutively entering a manure pit on their farm. The pit measured 20 by 24 feet and was 10 feet deep. The victims were a 65-year-old dairy farmer, his two sons aged 37 and 28, a 15-year-old grandson, and a 63-year-old nephew.

The younger son initially entered the pit to replace a shear pin on an agitator shaft. While attempting to climb out of the pit, the initial victim was overcome and fell to the bottom. The grandson then entered the pit to attempt a rescue. He too was overcome and collapsed. The nephew, the older son, and the dairy farmer then entered the pit one at a time, attempting to rescue those already overcome.

Each was overcome and collapsed in turn. A carpet installer working at the farm house then entered the pit to attempt a rescue. He too was overcome but was rescued by his assistant and subsequently recovered. Finally, the owner of a local farm implement business arrived on the scene with two of his workers and, using a rope, extricated the five victims from the pit.

When the local emergency rescue squad arrived on the scene approximately 20 minutes after the incident, they immediately began cardiopulmonary resuscitation. The nephew was pronounced dead at the scene. The remaining four victims were transported to the local hospital.

The farmer and his younger son were pronounced dead on arrival, and the older son died an hour after reaching the emergency room. The grandson was transferred to a major trauma center by helicopter but he died approximately 6 hours after his removal from the pit. Reports of the medical examiner cite methane asphyxiation as the cause of these five deaths.