

Case 367. 48-year-old bartender died when she was overcome by carbon dioxide in the building basement due to a faulty beverage carbon dioxide pump.

A 48-year-old bartender died when she was overcome by carbon dioxide in the building basement due to a faulty beverage carbon dioxide pump. A 300-pound liquid carbon dioxide storage tank was located outside of the building on the main level. The carbon dioxide was distributed via lines to the basement where the beverage (such as syrups, soda and tonic) boxes were located. Each beverage box was connected to its specific carbon dioxide pump to provide carbonation. Bartenders were required to remove the empty beverage boxes and replace them with full boxes. The decedent had provided bartending activities for the evening of the incident. After all the patrons went home after midnight, she counted the money and then punched out. For reasons unknown, she went down to the basement. Early the next morning, patrons arrived at the building. Seeing the decedent's car, one of the patrons began searching the building for her. The basement door was open (usually closed) and the lights were on. This patron heard a hissing noise in the basement, so he went downstairs. He found the decedent unconscious near the beverage boxes, which was also the location of the hissing noise. He closed the carbon dioxide valve and could hear the decedent breathing. He became lightheaded, and went back upstairs. Emergency response was summoned. Emergency responders entered the basement and found the decedent in cardiac arrest and while providing aid, they also became lightheaded. Emergency response personnel removed the decedent from the basement and transported her to the hospital. Her blood alcohol was elevated. The cause of her cardiac arrest may be secondary to atrial fibrillation secondary to alcohol intoxication and hypothermia secondary to exposure to cold temperatures. (Her body temperature was 91.5 when she arrived at the hospital).

MIOSHA General Industry Safety and Health Division issued one Serious citation at the conclusion of its investigation.

Serious: OH PART 430 HAZARD COMMUNICATION [R 325.77002], 1910.1200(e)(1):

Employers shall develop, implement, and maintain at each workplace, a written hazard communication program which at least describes how the criteria specified in paragraphs (f), (g), and (h) will be met.

- No program was developed, implemented, and/or maintained. Employees were exposed to carbon dioxide while changing beverage boxes in the basement, as well as cleaning chemicals.