

Case 165. 38-year-old lift truck driver in a frozen food distribution center was killed when several tons of frozen food that had been stored on racks fell onto him when the racks collapsed.

A 38-year-old male lift truck driver in a frozen food distribution center was killed when several tons of frozen food that had been stored on racks fell onto him when the racks collapsed. The decedent had been working unsupervised as he was placing and removing frozen products weighing 5,000-6,000 pounds onto a rack system in a subzero freezer using a powered industrial truck.

Storage Rack System: The storage rack system consisted of two rows of back-to-back storage racks. The metal racks were 88 feet long and 25 feet high. The storage rack was accessed from a central aisle and two perimeter aisles. Each row of storage rack was 12 bays long and each bay had three storage “shelf” levels spaced 68 inches vertically as well as storage at the floor level. Each shelf measured 40 inches wide by 48 inches deep and held two pallets of goods stored one deep. The rack unit was anchored to the concrete floor. The upright frames of the rack were constructed of hot-rolled structural steel “C” channel vertical columns and hot-rolled structural steel angle horizontal and diagonal bracing members using welded connections.

Employee A was working on the archway of the freezer door and needed a hammer. As he walked to the shop to obtain one, the decedent drove the forklift into the freezer area. The decedent had deposited his load. With the forks elevated, it appeared as he attempted to turn and back out, he clipped a rack edge. As the racks began to fall, it appears he exited the forklift in the path of the falling frozen foods. Employee A, after returning from the shop opened the freezer door and pulled back the freezer curtains. He noticed that the rack and some boxes had fell. He called out for the decedent. When he did not get a response, he then called for the Dock Supervisor and went to the office to inform them of what had happened. The forklift was found leaning against the racks with the forks elevated. Emergency response was called. It took paramedics about two minutes from the time of the 911 call to arrive at the firm to assist in recovering the deceased. Emergency response personnel and the decedent’s coworkers began to dig through the pallets/product located four to five feet away from his forklift. They found him under approximately 40,000 pounds of frozen product (food and pallets). Forty to forty-five minutes elapsed from the beginning of the search to the time they found the decedent. After finding him, emergency response transported the decedent to a local hospital where he was declared dead.

MIOSHA General Industry Safety and Health Division issued the following alleged Serious and Other-than-Serious to the employer at the conclusion of their investigation:

SERIOUS: POWERED INDUSTRIAL TRUCKS, PART 21, RULE 2154(1).

Provide valid operator permit for powered industrial truck operators.

Firm allowed employee to operate hi-lo loading and unloading stock in freezer with permit that had expired approximately three years earlier.

OTHER-THAN-SERIOUS: RECORDING AND REPORTING OF OCCUPATIONAL INJURIES AND ILLNESSES, PART OSH 11, RULE 1131(1).

Record work-related injuries and illnesses that meet the recording criteria in Rule 408.22112(2)(a) subrules (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), (v), and (vi).

Inadequate recordkeeping, firm was using the old 200-Injury and Illness log for 2005-2006.