

Case 334. 32-year-old driver died following an attempt to contain a natural gas leak which occurred when his 53-foot long semi-tractor trailer struck associated piping at a well site.

A 32-year-old male driver died following an attempt to contain a natural gas leak which occurred when his 53-foot long semi-tractor trailer struck associated piping at a well site. Due to the impact the piping broke loose releasing an unspecified volume of natural gas which likely reached the vehicle engine compartment. A fire ensued, and the decedent was engulfed in the flames. The decedent had driven to the well site to pick up a 53-foot low-boy flatbed trailer loaded with well drilling components. The front of the trailer was facing the wellhead. To exit the area, the decedent decided to make a 180-degree left-hand turn around the well rather than back the tractor/trailer unit out of the site. The soil around the wellhead was muddy due to recent rains except for compacted gravel in an approximate 20-foot radius surrounding the wellhead. To avoid getting stuck in the mud, the decedent attempted to stay on the gravel. While making this sharp turn around the wellhead, the very front of the trailer just behind the gooseneck contacted and broke 2-inch gas lift lines and valves. The police report indicated the decedent first tried to back away from the piping he had struck. He then exited the tractor without shutting off the engine and attempted to shut off the flow of gas by closing the valves. It is postulated that vapors from the gas were ignited by the tractor's engine. The resulting explosion engulfed the tractor, trailer and the decedent in flames. Other employees working nearby ran to the site after hearing the explosion and found the decedent walking away from the well. He indicated to his coworkers and first responders he was trying to shut the valves. He died nine days later from injuries sustained during the incident.

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

Serious: OIL AND GAS DRILLING AND SERVICING OPERATIONS, PART 57, RULE 5711(1)(d):

The employer shall do all of the following: (d) Assure that vehicles not involved in the immediate rig operation are parked a minimum distance of 100 feet from the wellbore. Equivalent safety measures shall be taken where terrain, location or other conditions do not permit this spacing:

(No policy, procedure, or training to stay 100 feet from well, to include safe procedures when conditions do not permit clearance, employee maneuvered too close to the well head and struck piping with his trailer).