

Case 416. 21-year-old lifeguard died from a lightning strike.

A 21-year-old female college student working as a summer hire life guard died from a lightning strike. The decedent had observed an incoming storm, and as trained, cleared all people from the beach, secured boats and locked out buildings. For unknown reasons, she walked to a 6-foot wide by 6-foot-long wood bench swing suspended from metal chains approximately 3-feet long. The swing was located approximately 20 feet from shore. She was wearing building keys around her neck. While sitting on the swing, she began to smoke. A group of people who had been moved to a nearby pavilion indicated to responding police they saw the decedent sit on the swing in the rain as the storm approached. The storm grew strong; one of the group members considered moving the group from the pavilion into the beach house building itself for better protection. Group members indicated there were several lightning flashes followed by loud cracks of thunder as the storm moved over them. The group related to the police that there was one particularly bright flash. After the bright flash, the group looked toward the decedent and saw her on the swing but not moving. When they checked on her, she was unresponsive. Because they could not use their cell phones, they went to the beach house and called for help. A family member arrived and immediately started CPR; another coworker assisted. Emergency response was called and assumed care. The decedent was transported to a local hospital and then transferred to another hospital where she died three days later. A burn mark was located where the keys had hung around her neck. Subsequent investigation found a metal well pump casing with flowers planted around it located approximately 40 feet from the wood swing; some of the flower petals were brown, possibly singed. Her coworkers had tried to call her from the club house because she had not returned when the storm started. They stated the decedent had unplugged the landline phone as part of the procedures to shut down the beach house.

MIOSHA General Industry Safety and Health Division issued one Other-than-Serious citation and a Safety/Health Recommendation at the conclusion of its investigation.

OTHER-THAN-SERIOUS: RECORDING AND REPORTING OF OCCUPATIONAL INJURIES AND ILLNESSES, ADM PART 11, RULE 408.22139(1):

Basic requirement. Within 8 hours after the death of any employee from a work-related incident or the inpatient hospitalization of 3 or more employees as a result of a work-related incident, you must orally report the fatality/multiple hospitalization by telephone or in person to the Michigan Department of Consumer and Industry Services, Bureau of Safety and Regulation, State Secondary Complex, 7150 Harris Drive, Lansing, Michigan. Phone 1-800-858-0397.

There was no report made to MISOHA within 8 hours after death of an employee from a work-related incident.)

SAFETY/HEALTH RECOMMENDATION: Consider providing refresher awareness safety training for affected personnel that may be exposed to inclement weather.