

Safety and health alert

06/02 Abattoir worker falls into scald tank

Incident

An abattoir worker suffered extensive severe burns when he overbalanced and fell into an open scald tank, whilst scalding goat carcasses.

The accident occurred while the worker was standing on a steel platform probing the bottom of the tank with a stick. He overbalanced and fell into the open tank containing water at 65°C.

Prompt action by fellow employees, who administered appropriate first aid, prevented more serious injuries.

Factors

1. The steel platform had been provided as an ergonomic measure to overcome excessive stretching by the worker when pushing carcasses under the water. This however had the effect of making the height of the tank at the worker's position less than is required for safe operations.
2. The steel platform was of sturdy construction but not permanently fixed (for cleaning purposes) to the floor. Although not a problem under normal circumstances, the platform may have moved when the worker's weight shifted due to his initial overbalance.
3. Prolonged manual handling activities had caused the injured worker to be weak in the shoulder, which may have been a contributing factor to his overbalancing when using the probe stick.
4. Access to control valves on the opposite side of the tank invited the operator to lean over the tank to adjust valves rather than walk around.

Recommendations

Hot water and open tanks should be identified as workplace hazards. The risks should be assessed and appropriate controls implemented before work commences. Staff should be made aware of the risks and trained in the work procedures required to enable them to work safely.

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the WorkSafe internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au, or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email: safety@docep.wa.gov.au.

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