



N E W S R E L E A S E

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Cal/OSHA Cites Metal Processing Company after Preventable Accident Asphyxiates Worker

Santa Ana—Cal/OSHA has cited Kittyhawk Inc. \$73,105 for serious safety violations following a March 13, 2016 confined space accident in which a worker was asphyxiated. Cal/OSHA investigators found the Garden Grove-based metal processing company failed to comply with confined space regulations that resulted in the serious illness.

On March 13, a Kittyhawk supervisor sent an untrained production assistant into a pressure vessel furnace to perform maintenance on it. The assistant did not have an oxygen sensor with him when he descended into the unit, which is only 49 inches wide and 98 inches tall, and was filled with argon gas. Argon is a noble gas that is chemically inert under most conditions and is colorless, odorless, and much heavier than air.

When the worker was overcome by the argon gas and collapsed inside the unit, a second worker went in after him and became dizzy and lost consciousness. A third employee then took a nearby fan and blew fresh air into the confined space, which provided air to breathe. The first worker spent four days in a hospital receiving treatment for his illness, and the second employee was transported to the hospital and was treated and released.

“Confined spaces can be deceptively dangerous,” said Cal/OSHA Chief Juliann Sum. “Employers must take special precautions to evaluate and monitor the hazards and prepare for emergency rescues.”

Cal/OSHA cited Kittyhawk Inc. for nine safety violations including three serious, three serious accident-related and three general in nature. These violations involved Kittyhawk’s failure to identify permit-required confined spaces, train the employees to safely perform their work in these confined spaces, failure to monitor the atmospheric conditions in a confined space during maintenance, and failure to develop effective rescue and emergency procedures for rescuing endangered employees from confined spaces.

Cal/OSHA first adopted confined space regulations in 1978 in order to prevent fatalities and serious injuries. California defines a permit-required confined space as one that has limited entry and exit openings, is not designed for continuous worker occupancy and has one or more of the following characteristics:

- Has a hazardous or potentially hazardous atmosphere including too little or too much oxygen, and/or presence of toxic gases.
- Has a material that can engulf an employee, such as grain, sand or sugar.
- Has an internal layout (such as floors that slope downwards) that can trap or asphyxiate a worker.
- Has any other serious safety or health hazard, such as machinery with moving parts, sources of electrical shocks, burning or drowning hazards.

More information on confined spaces is available on the [Cal/OSHA website](#), including [information for employers](#) who would like free assistance developing a plan to minimize the occurrence of confined-space accidents.

A serious violation is cited when there is a realistic possibility that death or serious harm could result from the actual hazardous condition. More information about the types of citations and penalties that they carry can be found in the [User's Guide to Cal/OSHA](#).

Cal/OSHA helps protect workers from health and safety hazards on the job in almost every workplace in California. [Cal/OSHA's Consultation Services Branch](#) provides free and voluntary assistance to employers to improve their health and safety programs. Employers should call (800) 963-9424 for assistance from Cal/OSHA Consultation Services.

Employees with work-related questions or complaints may contact DIR's Call Center in English or Spanish at 844-LABOR-DIR (844-522-6734). The California Workers' Information line at 866-924-9757 provides recorded information in English and Spanish on a variety of work-related topics. Complaints can also be filed confidentially with [Cal/OSHA district offices](#).

Members of the press may contact Erika Monterroza or Peter Melton at (510) 286-1161, and are encouraged to [subscribe to get email alerts](#) on DIR's press releases or other departmental updates.

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