

## **Workplace Fatality Summary Report:**

### **Worker Fatally Injured After Entering a Sewer Manhole**

## The Contents of this Report

This report summarizes the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety's Occupational Health and Safety Branch investigation of a fatal incident. The information contained in the report is intended for educational purposes only.

## Incident Summary

A worker was fatally injured when they entered a sewer manhole by ladder and became asphyxiated.

## Background Information

On August 30, 2022, three employees were dispatched to a sewer manhole to resolve a reported blockage.

The workers did not intend or plan to enter the confined space via the manhole. The atmosphere of the confined space was not tested for hazardous substances prior to the worker's exposure.

## Equipment, Materials and Incident Photos

### Manhole Approach:

Figure 1 shows the manhole where the workplace fatality occurred, facing east



Figure 1

## Manhole Vertical View:

Figure 2 provides an overhead perspective of the manhole, including the ladder that Worker 1 stood on before falling after losing consciousness.



Figure 2

## Sequence of Events

On the evening of August 30, 2022, Worker 1 received a call notifying them of a sewer main blockage. Worker 1 responded to the scene along with a coworker (Worker 2); these two workers were later joined by a third employee (Worker 3). Together, the workers shifted soil to remove the manhole cover. The uncovered entrance was approximately one metre in diameter.

Workers intended to unblock the sewer main by transmitting high-pressure water into the sewer from the flusher-equipped vehicle. Workers 2 and 3 noticed that Worker 1 had partially entered the manhole by balancing on a ladder.

Workers 2 and 3 attempted to extract Worker 1 from the manhole ladder; their efforts were not successful. Worker 1 lost consciousness and fell approximately three metres from the top of the manhole to the bottom of the sewer line - a low-oxygen environment containing hazardous levels of H<sub>2</sub>S.

Worker 3 called emergency services, who removed Worker 1 from the manhole and made resuscitation efforts, which were unsuccessful.

## **Completion**

The employer pleaded guilty to contravening subsection 21-1 (2) of *The Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, 2020*, failing to take all practicable steps to prevent exposure of a worker, to an extent that is likely to be harmful to the worker, to a chemical substance or biological substance that may be hazardous or a chemical substance or biological substance in combination or association with any other substance present that may be hazardous, resulting in the death of a worker.

The Court imposed a fine of \$125,000, with a surcharge of \$50,000, for a total amount of \$175,000.