Dodging Disaster: Komatsu American Corp.

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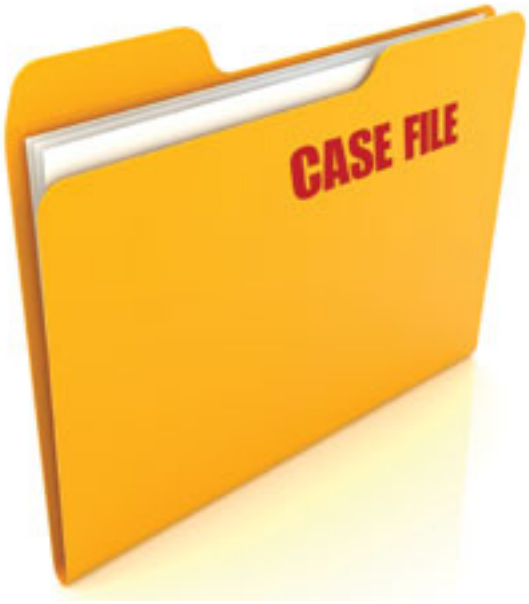

Chem.Info's recurring Dodging Disasters feature details the missteps and safety oversights that led to a recent plant disaster and provides actionable information to help processors avoid the same mistakes.

Case File: Komatsu American Corp.

- **Peoria, Ill.**
- **OSHA Citation Date: March 7, 2013**
- **OSHA Fine: Proposed penalties total $82,000**

In August 2012 a worker died at a Komatsu America Corp. truck manufacturing plant in Illinois after sustaining injuries while testing hydraulic cylinders for leakage. During the testing process, the worker was struck by pressurized hydraulic fluid that was released after the hydraulic coupler on the return line of the hoist stand failed. The worker died two days after sustaining the injuries.

OSHA conducted an investigation citing Komatsu America Corp. with two repeat violations and two serious violations totaling $82,000 of proposed penalties.

The two repeat violations included “failing to develop machine-specific energy control procedures and training to ensure workers understood energy control procedures.” Similar violations were cited to the Peoria facility in January 2011.

The two serious violations were cited for “failing to evaluate and correct repeated catastrophic failures of critical machine parts, include authorized employees while conducting annual inspections, document annual inspection reviews of energy

control procedures and include each authorized employee in the review.”

Several steps from developing procedures to proper training could have been taken to prevent the tragic accident from occurring. The Fluid Power Safety Institute states the only way to avoid accidents involving hydraulics is to have mandatory training for everyone who works with hydraulics as well as including information in weekly safety meetings. It also suggests manufacturers provide accurate information that is user friendly. The Fluid Power Safety Institute states it is important to supply workers with the tools such as flowmeters, pressure gauges, temperature gauges and other tools required to properly service hydraulics.

"Komatsu America has a responsibility to ensure equipment is maintained in good working order and that employees are properly trained in the safe operation of equipment they are required to use," said Tom Bielema, OSHA's area director in Peoria. "This unfortunate incident might have been prevented had the employer addressed previous incidents where the hydraulic coupler had failed."

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