Dodging Disaster: VPP Group

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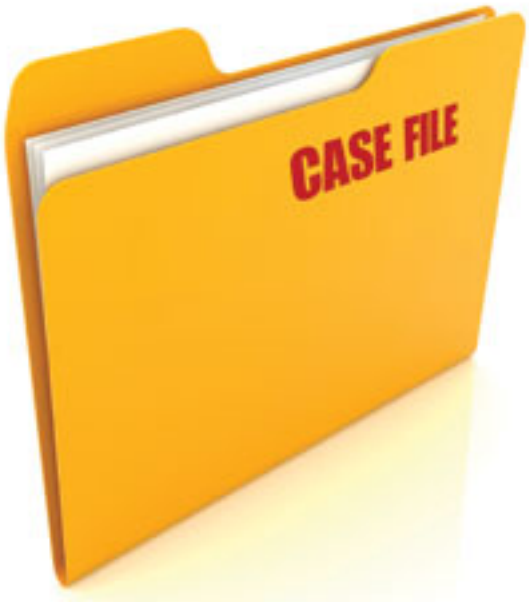

***Chem.Info*'s recurring Dodging Disasters feature details the missteps and safety oversights that led to a recent plant disaster and provides actionable information to help processors avoid the same mistakes. Today we take a look at a recent incident at VPP Group.**

VPP Group, LLC
Norwalk, Wis.
OSHA Citation Date: June 7, 2012
OSHA Fine: $186,000.00

On December 9, 2011 Edgar Rodriguez Becerra was killed by electrocution in an industrial accident at VPP Group's western Wisconsin beef processing facility. OSHA's investigation into the conditions that led to Mr. Becerra's death was concluded the following June when a Citation and Notice of Penalty was issued to the company.

Among VPP Group's reported violations, OSHA alleges to have found ten willful or serious violations including a leaky water pipe located very near equipment that was not weatherproofed or rated for wet environments. This factor was determined to be the direct cause of death. Other OSHA citations filed with the report include:

- placing electrical fixtures, boxes, and fittings in locations where water could enter and accumulate.

- failing to properly adjust a grinder's work rest to protect employees from flying debris.
- failing to require the use of fall protection equipment.

This case appears to be particularly grievous because of the wide variety of washdown and waterproof equipment available on the market. Safety managers in food facilities — especially those involved in messy production applications like beef processing — should have a passing understanding of harsh environment challenges presented when working with wet product. A piece of equipment rated to handle washdown would have been able to stand up to a nearby leaky pipe.

Compounding this tragedy is that OSHA had previously cited the company after a worker was electrocuted there in 2009. Due to the willful nature of the company's most recent violations, OSHA has placed VPP Group in the Severe Violator Enforcement Program, which, the administration says, "mandates targeted follow-up inspections to ensure compliance with the law."

"VPP Group has a legal and moral responsibility to maintain a safe environment for its workers," said Kim Stille, OSHA's area director in Madison, Wis., in a press release published by the administration. "Placing electrical devices in dangerous locations and failing to provide fall protection shows zero commitment to worker safety and health."

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