

71-year-old subcontractor killed after falling into industrial vat at New Jersey chemical plant

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A 71-year-old worker was killed on Monday, January 19, after falling into a large industrial container at the Bayway Chemical Plant in Linden, New Jersey. According to police, the man was working on top of a 6,000-gallon vat being filled with mineral oil when he fell inside. Emergency responders recovered his body from the container, where he was pronounced dead at the scene.

The worker, a resident of Iselin, New Jersey, was employed as a subcontractor at the Bayway Chemical Plant, which is operated by Infineum, a global chemical company that produces lubricant additives. Neither his name nor the subcontracting firm that employed him have been released.

The incident is being investigated by the Linden Police Department, with a separate inquiry launched by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). No findings have yet been released by either agency.

In a statement, Infineum claimed that it would conduct its own internal investigation into the death and that it was “cooperating with all agencies in their investigations.”

The Bayway Chemical Plant, operated by Phillips 66 affiliate Infineum, is part of a network of aging industrial facilities that line New Jersey’s manufacturing corridor. The sprawling complex extends across a large tract of land adjacent to residential neighborhoods, underscoring how hazardous infrastructure is routinely embedded within working-class communities.

Many of these facilities—built decades ago and operating far beyond their intended lifespan—are marked by deteriorating equipment, extensive chemical handling systems and constant maintenance demands. Despite corporate claims of safe, modern operations, workers routinely confront dangerous conditions involving bulk liquids, confined spaces and elevated platforms—hazards frequently intensified by deferred maintenance and the

use of subcontracted labor.

That the victim was employed as a subcontractor is a critical aspect of the case. Subcontracted workers are routinely assigned the most dangerous jobs in industrial settings, including maintenance, cleaning and tasks involving confined spaces and large containers.

This employment arrangement fragments responsibility between plant operators, contracting firms and regulatory agencies, allowing accountability for serious injuries or deaths to be deflected or delayed. In many cases, the identity of subcontracting firms is not publicly disclosed, and workers’ safety concerns are lost as responsibility is shuffled between contractors and plant owners.

Official investigations are presented as guarantees that workplace deaths will be thoroughly examined. In practice, however, such inquiries often stretch on for months or years, during which time families and coworkers receive little information. When findings are eventually released, they result in limited penalties that leave the conditions leading to the fatal incident largely unchanged. Throughout the process, production continues, corporate operations remain uninterrupted and official reviews serve to contain scrutiny rather than to address the causes of workplace deaths.

The death in Linden follows a series of recent workplace fatalities in which official investigations were announced, not to expose the conditions that led to the deaths, but to contain scrutiny while operations continued uninterrupted.

A short list includes the deaths of U.S. Postal Service workers Nick Acker, who was killed after becoming trapped in a mail-sorting machine during maintenance, and Russell Scruggs Jr., who died after falling and striking his head at a processing facility, as well as the death of Stellantis autoworker Ronald Adams Sr., who

was crushed while performing maintenance work at an engine plant in Michigan. In each case, lethal hazards emerged in the course of routine operations, and official inquiries functioned to process the fatalities as isolated incidents, severed from broader questions of workplace organization, safety practices and responsibility.

Workplace fatalities remain a regular feature of life in the United States. Federal data show that thousands of workers are killed on the job each year, with many more suffering life-altering injuries.

Older workers and subcontracted employees—like the 71-year-old killed in the Linden incident—are among the most vulnerable, routinely exposed to hazardous conditions with limited protections and little public accountability when deaths occur. These conditions are being intensified by the dismantling of workplace safety regulations under the Trump administration, following decades in which such protections have been systematically weakened by successive administrations, both Democratic and Republican.

In the case at the Bayway Chemical Plant, the worker remains unnamed, his employer has not been publicly identified, and investigators have released no findings. As with other recent workplace deaths, authorities have announced investigations, while key questions surrounding safety practices, subcontracting arrangements and responsibility for the fatal conditions remain unanswered.

The continuing toll of workplace deaths reflects what Friedrich Engels described as “social murder,” in which workers are killed by conditions deliberately tolerated in the pursuit of profit. These deaths are outcomes of a social system that subordinates human life to production and treats worker deaths as an acceptable cost.



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