

H-E-B grocery warehouse worker dies after workplace accident in San Antonio

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Austin Lewis Flores, a worker at a warehouse for the H-E-B grocery chain in San Antonio, Texas, died after a workplace accident earlier this month. Reports indicate that on April 4 he was working with a floor jack when he was hit by a forklift.

Flores was sent to a clinic where an X-ray revealed he had a broken ankle. Several days later he was later found unresponsive at his home. An autopsy revealed that he died of a pulmonary thromboembolism that developed after a blood clot had dislodged and traveled to his lungs.

Austin's mother Brenda Flores cared for him for four days after the accident. She said that he had a hematoma, a localized collection of clotted blood outside blood vessels, often caused by trauma, about the size of a watermelon on the right side of his body. He could not lie down straight and could not sit down for too long because of the pain.

In less than 24 hours, nearly 1,000 comments were left on a Facebook page where Flores' death was reported. Some of the commenters spoke of similar incidents that they, friends and family members had experienced.

This follows the death of another H-E-B warehouse worker at the same location last October. Teresa Dominguez, 27, was found unconscious in a freezer. The Bexar County Medical Examiner's Office later determined that she had died of blunt trauma. Witnesses said that she had exhibited signs of distress while driving a forklift. After being discovered, EMS was called and transported her to a local hospital, where she later died.

"Six months and nothing has changed. No major safety improvements. Nothing was fixed," Brenda Flores said. "My son should have been transported to an ER immediately from hitting that floor at H-E-B, no

excuses, no exceptions. And now my son is gone, too."

Workplace injuries and deaths are not uncommon in warehouses. Grocery stores are also hazardous workplaces. Some of the most common causes of injuries include forklift and other vehicle accidents, falling objects, slips on wet or cluttered floors, extreme temperatures in freezers and overexertion and repetitive stress.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, grocery workers experience nearly twice the average rate of nonfatal workplace injuries compared to other private sector workers. In 2024, the approximately 2.6 out of 100 workers suffered some type of workplace injury, while for grocery workers they suffered at a rate of about 4.0 per 100.

There have been multiple cases of workers dying after being locked in freezers. In one case in February 2024, Nguyet Le, an employee at an Arby's restaurant in New Iberia, Louisiana, died when a latch on a walk-in freezer broke. An autopsy revealed that Le died of hypothermia. The freezer was typically kept at temperatures of minus 10 degrees Fahrenheit (-23 Celsius) or colder. A former employee reported that workers would use a screwdriver to open and close the freezer door and would prop it open with a box of oil. Court documents for a lawsuit filed by Le's family said that "the investigating officer relayed that inside of the door of the freezer had been bloodied, leading him to conclude Ms. Le panicked once locked inside and beat her hands bloody trying to escape or get someone's attention."

In 2023 the *World Socialist Web Site* reported on the death of a worker at a Kroger grocery warehouse in Memphis, Tennessee. In that incident the worker was found unresponsive while working in an environment without air conditioning during a heatwave.

The COVID-19 pandemic proved to be especially dangerous for grocery workers. Under conditions where these workers were considered essential, at least 158 workers are known to have died, with many more infected or exposed.

H-E-B workers are not covered by a union, but in unionized workplaces officials work as little more than agents of management. The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) has rammed through pro-company contracts across the country in the face of worker opposition. In spite of a history of workplace accidents in the grocery industry, unions have done nothing to improve worker safety in these environments.

Government workplace safety regulations are weak due to limited enforcement mechanisms and low penalties for violations. Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) has limited authority and resources. Many employers consider the low fines as a cost of doing business rather than a serious consequence that will cause them to change their practices.

Based in San Antonio, H-E-B is a major grocery chain, operating over 400 grocery stores in Texas and Mexico. The company employs about 175,000 workers and is one of the largest private employers in Texas. In 2025 it had total revenues of \$50 billion, making it the 19th largest retailer in the United States. H-E-B Chairman Charles Butt was listed 230th on the Forbes list of billionaires in 2025, with a net worth of over \$10 billion.



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