

Construction worker killed in horrific incident at Australian gas project

By John Harris
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Late last month, Carl Delaney, a 56 year-old father of two, was killed in the Northern Territory (NT) when he fell into a cryogenic tank containing Perlite insulation, a white granular material made of volcanic glass. He was working at the massive INPEX Ichthys LNG Project construction site at Bladin Point near Darwin.

Delaney was pulled from the tank alive and treated by a medical unit onsite but died before an ambulance arrived on the scene. In its official statement INPEX said that the construction worker had been in a confined space installing insulation in a cryogenic liquefied natural gas tank.

Delaney was employed by Whittens, a contracting agency for Kawasaki Heavy Industry, part of JKC Australia, which won a \$125 million contract to complete the 47-metre high cryogenic tanks.

While the circumstances surrounding the November 29 accident are not yet clear, media reports suggest the man's safety harness may have broken or was not properly secured.

Last month's tragedy, however, is just one of many serious safety incidents that have occurred at the site. According to the Thomson Reuters news agency, the project, which had 8,500 workers on site in 2016, is more than a year behind schedule and running 10 percent over budget.

Such is the pressure at the project that eight fly-in fly-out (FIFO) employees committed suicide between 2012 and 2016.

Delaney's co-workers immediately walked off the job following the accident and donated a day's pay to assist his wife and family.

Construction workers told the *Northern Territory News* that the death was only "a matter of time" and that safety standards had dropped "massively."

"When the project started, the motto was you could

stop the job if something wasn't right," he said. "That has slowly declined to the point where no one wants to speak up. If you don't work your arse off, you're pushed to the side and the train just keeps on going. Now, I never feel 100 percent safe going to work."

Another worker told the newspaper that management was covering up the real situation on the project and that only 5 percent of all the injuries at the site were made public.

In March 2016, 450 workers marched in Darwin over the dangerous lack of safety at the INPEX project.

In March this year, an electrician was hospitalised after a compressor hose broke free and punctured his leg. A day later, 11 workers were exposed to ammonia vapour. In October, a four-wheel drive and two INPEX transport buses collided at 6 a.m. on Channel Island Road, near the project.

And in November, a few weeks before Delaney lost his life, another construction worker narrowly escaped death after a safety rail on a 30-metre high cryogenic tank collapsed and he fell through scaffolding. He was pulled to safety by fellow workers.

Attempting to placate growing anger among workers on the project, INPEX and JKC suspended work on the site following Delaney's death, declaring that operations would resume after a review of all work areas, safety measures and procedures.

The Electrical Trades Union (ETU), however, said that a full site audit had not been carried out and that the only area sealed off was where the fatality occurred.

While the unions issue occasional statements about work safety, they have all worked hand-in-glove with management to drive up productivity, increasing working hours, and undermining basic safety.

In the aftermath of Delaney's death, an unnamed

Construction, Forestry, Mining and Engineering Union official on ABC Radio in Darwin attempted to blame workers for the unsafe conditions.

“When a fatality occurs at a construction site, or in any situation in the workplace, people ring in stating ‘I’ve known about this for weeks and months’ but they ring in too bloody late,” he said “It’s natural for human beings to say that they’ve called us and been complaining to the company that things are wrong ...”

In February 2012, the construction unions endorsed the Ichthys Onshore Construction Greenfields Agreement that contains clauses that allow management to avoid being held fully accountable for workplace accidents and which shift responsibility onto workers.

The agreement states: “Each Employee is accountable to establish and maintain a safe and healthy work area, ensure safe and healthy work practices are followed at all times and within their duty of care, take responsibility for their personal safety and the safety of other Employees.”

It also states that workers are required to raise any personal concern or issue directly with their immediate team leader or supervisor “thereby providing the employer with an opportunity to resolve or assist the concern.”

The reality is, however, that workers who raise safety concerns fear that they face harassment, being blacklisted or sacked on the spot if they are still within their six-month probation period.

The unions, which control industry superannuation funds and building investment, have a vested interest in driving up productivity and ensuring that ever-tighter completion deadlines are met.

In October this year, the multi-million dollar superannuation building industry fund CBUS, which has construction union representatives on its board, declared that it had been “servicing” the INPEX project and assisting the company.

The Ichthys Gas Project channels gas via an 890-kilometre pipeline from the Browse Basin off Australia’s North-West coast to the onshore processing facility in Darwin. When completed, the project will boost the Northern Territory’s gas exports and increase the Territory’s economy by 15 percent.

Carl Delaney’s death is not an aberration but part of a rising industrial death toll across all industrial sectors

in Australia. Just one week after he was killed two other workers died in separate workplace accidents.

On December 7, Michael Stinson died after becoming trapped in an ink vat whilst carrying out maintenance at DIC Australia, in Sydney’s west. Two other workers were injured in the incident. In Queensland, a 22-year old worker was killed after suffering critical chest and abdominal injuries when operating a cherry picker at the Spectrapave construction site in Yatala.

According to SafeWork Australia, 354 construction workers were killed between 2007 and 2016 and 29 killed in the industry so far this year.

Overall there have been 165 workplace deaths in 2017, the majority occurring in the transport, postal and warehousing, and agriculture industries. In 2016, 25 people were killed in workplace falls, accounting for 14 percent of all industrial fatalities for that year.

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