



Significant Incident Summary No. 8

Shire worker drowns while pumping water for roadworks

Background

In February 2022, a shire worker drowned after entering a soak (body of water) on a rural property while pumping water to a water cart for road work maintenance. The worker had received training and was experienced in the task of pumping water from the soak to the water cart.

While performing the task, a funnel blew into the soak. The worker entered the water while fully clothed and wearing work boots to retrieve the funnel. When the worker did not return at the expected time and did not respond to calls, co-workers attended the soak and located the worker in the water.

Contributory factors

Factors which may contribute to incidents like this include:

- absence of safe work procedures in relation to working near open water sources, including clear directions not to enter the water
- no risk assessment of tasks requiring workers to work in or near open water sources such as dams and soaks
- lack of instruction and training in relation to safe systems of work when working near open water sources
- workers performing tasks outside of their usual duties
- workers entering bodies of water while wearing unsuitable clothing or footwear
- workers entering bodies of water while working alone
- absence of barriers between pumps and bodies of water
- differences between ambient temperature and water temperature.

Actions required

In circumstances where workers are required to work near water, measures to minimise the risk of a similar incident occurring include:

- where practicable, eliminating the risks associated with working near an open water source by choosing alternative water sources, such as overhead standpipes

- conducting comprehensive risk assessments for tasks carried out near open water sources, including an assessment of the suitability of the site
- developing safe work procedures for work carried out near open water sources, including directions that workers should not enter the water
- if a worker must enter an open water source for a work activity, ensuring a risk assessment is conducted before they enter the water, a second worker is present and emergency procedures are in place
- providing instructions and training to workers who are conducting activities near open water sources
- providing training on the safe systems of work for workers required to work near water
- locating pumps away from water sources
- creating physical barriers between workers and bodies of water
- where practicable, displaying signage that warns people not to enter the open water source.

Further information

Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety

- [Safety alert 07/2016 - Person drowns in plastic lined liquid waste pond | WorkSafe](#)

Farmsafe Australia

- [Resources - Farmsafe – Toolbox Talks – Working Near Water](#)