

# Deadly Sugar Plant Wasn't Inspected by OSHA

Ben Neary, Associated Press

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) — The Wyoming Department of Workforce Services has no record of ever inspecting Western Sugar Cooperative's beet-processing plant in Lovell before a woman died there in an industrial accident this year.

The department, charged with ensuring workplace safety, only inspected the facility after the Jan. 4 death of Anfesa Galaktionoff, 28, who fell through a floor opening and into sugar beet-processing equipment.

The agency last month announced 12 citations and proposed \$71,000 in fines against Western Sugar, with Workforce Services Director Joan Evans saying at the time: "This tragic loss of life could have been prevented.

"The employer failed to properly implement OSHA safety standards that require adequate guarding around floor openings," she said.

In response to an Associated Press request for inspection reports of the facility for the last five years, Mick Finn, an agency lawyer, said the state has no records of such visits conducted before Galaktionoff's death.

Officials said the department undertakes inspections in response to all fatalities, catastrophes and complaints.

John Ysebaert, administrator of the department's Office of Standards and Compliance, said the agency decides which workplaces to target with unannounced inspections by using a formula that includes worker compensation claims.

Kent Wimmer, a spokesman for Denver-based Western Sugar, said he couldn't confirm whether the company intends to ask the state to lower the proposed fines. He said the company is addressing the issues the state raised about the Lovell plant.

"We are fully committed to the highest quality and safety of our employees, and we are providing a safe work environment," he said.

Western Sugar, formed in 2002, is comprised of 1,400 grower-owners in Montana, Wyoming, Colorado and Nebraska. The Lovell plant, bought in 2002, employs about 50 people, and adds 70 seasonal workers, such as Galaktionoff, during the winter beet-harvest months.

In recent years, the cooperative has been hit with numerous citations at its facilities.

Ysebaert said his office's earlier citations against Western Sugar's Torrington

## **Deadly Sugar Plant Wasn't Inspected by OSHA**

Published on Food Manufacturing (<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com>)

---

operation didn't trigger an inspection at the Lovell plant. He said they expected company management to share the outcome of those citations across their facilities.

Last July, federal workplace safety inspectors in Montana proposed fining Western Sugar \$193,000 after a January 2013 inspection at a Billings plant. Among four citations alleging repeat safety violations were charges of unguarded elevated platforms and horizontal shafting.

At the time the citations were announced last summer, Jeff Funke, director of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's office in Billings, said, "This employer continues to put its workforce in jeopardy by neglecting to comply with standards and implement safeguards."

Art Hazen, the office's assistant director, said the penalties were reduced to \$117,250 but that all the citations were upheld.

The Montana OSHA office stated last year that OSHA had inspected Western Sugar operations 16 times since February 2008 and found 30 violations in Montana, Wyoming, Colorado and Nebraska.

Wyoming long has ranked among the top states for workplace fatalities. The AFL-CIO, which tracks workplace deaths, said last month in a report, based on 2012 figures, that Wyoming, with 12.2 fatalities per 100,000 workers, was second behind North Dakota, which had 17.7.

The Legislature in 2010 voted down a proposal from a task force appointed by former Gov. Dave Freudenthal that would have increased employer penalties for safety violations despite support from industry and worker groups.

Kim Floyd, the union's executive secretary in Wyoming, wasn't surprised that the state had not inspected the Lovell plant before Galaktionoff's death, saying the department doesn't have enough inspectors to look at every plant.

Ysebaert said Wyoming has 9 compliance officers who conduct unannounced workplace safety inspections for roughly 23,000 registered employers in the state. Another 13 consultation officers respond to employers' requests regarding whether their workplaces meet standards.

Ysebaert said state inspectors did 248 compliance inspections in 2013 in addition to another 54 inspections in response to formal complaints and nine workplace fatalities.

Tom Edwards, a rancher who lives in Lovell and knew Galaktionoff since she first moved to the state with her mother as a girl from her native Alaska, said he would have expected OSHA to inspect the Lovell plant.

Edwards said he regarded himself as her foster grandfather. He had intended to leave his ranch to her, as he has no children of his own and they both shared a love

## **Deadly Sugar Plant Wasn't Inspected by OSHA**

Published on Food Manufacturing (<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com>)

---

of horses.

"She bred one mare," he said. "It was going to be the high point in her life."

Edwards said Galaktionoff didn't live long enough to see the colt born, about a month ago.

**Source URL (retrieved on 04/28/2015 - 6:34am):**

<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2014/06/deadly-sugar-plant-wasnt-inspected-osa>