



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

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News Release

BENTONIA CONTRACTOR COULD HAVE PREVENTED DEADLY FLORA EXPLOSION, DEATH OF 25-YEAR-OLD WELDER, US DEPARTMENT OF LABOR INVESTIGATION FINDS

W.S. Red Hancock exposed workers to unsafe conditions including fire and explosion hazards

JACKSON, MS – Federal investigators have determined that the employer of a 25-year-old welder – who suffered fatal injuries in an explosion at a Flora work site in July 2022 – could have prevented the tragedy by following federal workplace safety standards.

The U.S. Department of Labor’s [Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#) learned the explosion occurred during welding operations while the work crew employed by W.S. Red Hancock Inc. replaced old metal tanks with fiberglass ones at a saltwater disposal site for oil and gas fields.

The explosion sent seven of the company’s employees to local hospitals, including the welder who died as a result of his injuries six days later.

“The terrible loss of a young worker’s life is a reminder of how volatile and dangerous welding and cutting work can be,” said OSHA Area Office Director Courtney Bohannon in Jackson, Mississippi. “W.S. Red Hancock failed to follow established safety procedures, leaving a family, friends and co-workers to grieve a preventable loss of life and the other injured workers to deal with the aftermath.”

OSHA’s investigation led the agency to issue a citation to W.S. Red Hancock, a Bentonina oilfield contractor, for willfully failing to fill the saltwater disposal tank with water, or to thoroughly clean, ventilate and test the tank for flammable substances. OSHA also cited the company with serious violations for failing to:

- Instruct workers about unsafe conditions and regulations for working around equipment containing flammable substances.
- Make provisions for prompt medical attention for workers exposed to explosion hazards.
- Have valid certifications available that confirmed a person on site had first-aid training and that the closest infirmary or medical facility was more than 10 minutes away.
- Remove or protect movable fire hazards near welding operations and flammable substances.
- Ensure employees working in a basket aerial lift used or utilized fall protection.

OSHA has [proposed \\$196,886 in penalties to address the safety violations](#) found in the investigation.

W.S. Red Hancock Inc. has more than 75 years of experience in oilfield construction and services, dirt work, heavy construction and mechanical/fabrication. The company is licensed and operates in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.

The company has 15 business days from receipt of the citations and penalties to comply, request an informal conference with OSHA, or contest the findings before the independent [Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission](#).

[Visit OSHA’s website for information on developing a workplace safety and health program](#) and on [chemical hazards and toxic substances](#). Employers can also contact the agency [for information about OSHA’s compliance assistance resources and for free help on complying with OSHA standards](#).

Agency: Occupational Safety & Health Administration

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