

Man killed at Port Tampa Bay when sulfur pile collapses on his front-end loader

By Sara DiNatale, Times Staff Writer

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GIBSONTON — When a 30-foot mound of sulfur fell in a yellow avalanche and engulfed Joe Lammlein as he was working in a front-end loader Friday, his own brother tried to dig him out.

Three responding deputies and other workers also dug, desperate to save the 45-year-old worker trapped in a sulfur pit at Port Tampa Bay. But they couldn't help him. Lammlein died trapped inside the buried front loader at Port Redwing off Wyandotte Road.

It took about four hours for rescuers to recover his body, according to the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office.

On Friday evening, Lammlein's family was in mourning. Two brothers worked there Friday. Oldest brother George Lammlein said middle brother Mike was working on the other side of the sulfur pile. It was shortly after 10 a.m. The pile toppled onto the youngest brother, Joe Lammlein, after he went to scoop up sulfur and move it into a semitrailer truck.

"It could have happened to either one of them," said George Lammlein, 54.

Joe Lammlein of Palmetto likely died from inhaling the sulfur, said Hillsborough County Fire Rescue spokeswoman Nacole Revette. She said sulfur that is inhaled sticks to the lungs. The investigation into the death is ongoing; no official cause of death had been made public.

"(It was) a freak accident at work," Revette said. "It's hard for the co-workers who have to sit there and watch everything."

Joe Lammlein was an employee with Gulf Coast Bulk Equipment for about five years, his oldest brother said. According to a Tampa Port Authority news release from March 2015, the Palmetto company signed a six-year lease with the port to handle prilled sulfur imports on a 5-acre parcel at Port Redwing.

Revette said rescuers were able to reach the driver's seat of the front loader to confirm the driver had died. She said crews had to work carefully to remove the front loader to prevent causing another collapse.

A representative for the company could not be reached for comment. The Lammlein family said the company has



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Joe Lammlein of Palmetto died Friday when sulfur collapsed on his front-end loader at Port Tampa Bay, authorities said.

offered to pay for funeral costs.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration will investigate the accident, said Tampa area director Les Grove. Investigators will determine if the work site was at fault in the accident, and if so it could be cited and fined, Grove said.

George Lammlein described brother Joe as kind, caring and a devoted worker.

"He would have done anything for anybody," he said.

Times senior news researchers Caryn Baird and John Martin and staff writer Tony Marrero contributed to this report. Contact Sara DiNatale at sdinatale@tampabay.com or (813) 226-3400. Follow @sara_dinatale.

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