OSHA News Release

2002 - 09/06/2002 - Workplace Tragedy Leads To Management-Labor Cooperation; Northrop Grumman and Local Unions Vow To Improve Worker Safety

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Workplace Tragedy Leads To Management-Labor Cooperation;
Northrop Grumman and Local Unions Vow To Improve Worker Safety

GULFPORT, Miss. -- An accident that cost a worker his life may save other workers at a Gulfport plant from a similar fate. The Labor Department's Occupational Safety and Health Administration's inspection of the fatality has led to an agreement committing Northrop Grumman Ship Systems, Inc. and several local unions to safety improvements at the Gulfport facility and other locations in Mississippi and Louisiana.

OSHA cited the company's Gulfport facility, where about 800 employees make modules used in ship construction, for 33 serious safety violations with a proposed penalty of $131,000 following investigation of a March 5 fatality. A welder, working in the center section of a bay between two modules, was crushed between the two units when the one on which he was working rotated.

Northrop Grumman was cited for failing to properly center the 120-ton module on a supporting system and for several hazards involving two superjacks used to support the unit, including being overloaded and lacking proper top or base plates on which to rest. In addition, after being raised by the superjacks, the module was not blocked or cribbed to prevent shifting or jack failure.

Among the other serious hazards cited were unguarded floor holes, electrical hazards, welding hazards and machine guarding and fall protection deficiencies.

"This accident could have been avoided if the manufacturer's specifications for the jacks had been followed," said Clyde Payne, OSHA's Jackson area director. "The agreement that grew out of this tragedy, and the alliance that will follow, may save others in the future through a voluntary, cooperative and continuous safety and health emphasis."

As part of the pre-citation settlement, Northrop Grumman accepted all citations, agreed not to contest the inspection results and paid all penalties. The company also committed to hire
a full-time safety professional at the Gulfport facility, make improvements in its safety and health program and institute an accountability program that sets standards for managers based on their safety performance.

Along with the local unions at Northrop Grumman -- International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Pascagoula Metal Trades Council, New Orleans Metal Trades Council, International Brotherhood of Boilermakers and Boilermakers Local 693 -- the company will work towards a separate strategic alliance that would affect its four facilities in Pascagoula and Gulfport, Miss. and New Orleans and Tallulah, La. The alliance will focus on exchange of best practice information, expansion of training and education at the plants and commitment to significantly reducing lost workday injury and illness rates.

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