

# OKFACE NEWS

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## Life and Death in the Oil Field

From the first intentional oil well drilled in 1889, Oklahoma's economy has relied on oil production. In 1987, when the last of the state's major drilling booms ended, the number of oil-related jobs plummeted. However, oil and gas production in Oklahoma has rebounded in subsequent years to make petroleum the state's number one industry. Drilling operations in 2003 hit a 15-year high, and the oil and natural gas industry currently employs 50,000 Oklahomans. Without careful planning, the oil field can present many safety hazards to workers. Below are descriptions of fatal incidents that have occurred in Oklahoma.

- A worker was killed when he was struck by the kelly bushing and drillpipe slips blown out by compressed air used during cleanout of the conductor hole.
- A floor hand was working the tongs on a well servicing unit tripping tubing back in the hole. A setting plate fell from the top of the elevators and struck him in the head. The worker remained in a vegetative state in a nursing home until his death.

The Oklahoma Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (OKFACE) staff collect information on all work-related deaths and recommend prevention strategies. FACE is a research program of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Division of Safety Research.

For detailed reports, please go to:  
<http://www.health.state.ok.us/program/injury/okface/index.html>

- An experienced worker was killed when the rig's guyline anchors came loose, causing it to collapse. The worker, secured to the derrick with a safety harness, fell with the rig and was crushed by falling drillpipe.
- A worker was killed while adjusting counterweights on a pumping unit. The worker had made his adjustments, started the unit, and stepped close to the running unit. He had his back to the counterweights and was struck in the head and back by one of them.

Incidents, such as the examples above, can happen to anyone. It is important to take the extra time to ensure all proper safety recommendations are followed and that hazards are identified and controlled.

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## SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Conduct a pre-job inspection to identify, then eliminate or correct hazards.**
- **Be aware of areas where hazardous energy is released; stand clear of valves and fittings when removing or bleeding off pressure.**
- **Follow proper lockout/tagout procedures when hazards are identified.**
- **Ensure that personal protective equipment is worn, including fall protection and respiratory protection where appropriate.**
- **Double check any rigging or cables to ensure that they are secure and in proper working order.**
- **Ensure that all equipment is properly maintained, inspected prior to use, and suitably conditioned for the work to be performed.**

