

Sperry worker found dead in vat of solvent

By ALAN ARIAV
The Arizona Republic

A 33-year-old Sperry Corp. worker was found dead Wednesday night, apparently after she fell partly into a 4-foot-deep vat of industrial solvent and was overcome by fumes, police said Thursday.

Judy Ann Myer of the 17600 block of N. 19th Ave. apparently fell into the vat while trying to retrieve circuit boards at the bottom, said Sgt. Brad Thiss, a Phoenix police spokesman.

She died after breathing the toxic chlorothene vapors in a vat that is part of a degreaser machine used to clean the circuit boards, Thiss said.

"The vapors would have killed her within a couple of breaths," Thiss said. "They would have been fatal."

Vapors rising from the 6 inches of solvent at the bottom of the vat were being used in the circuit-cleaning process, he said.

Myer was found dead at 9:10 p.m., about 50 minutes after she had last been seen at the cleaning section in the southern end of the Sperry Aerospace and Marine Group plant, 21111 L.N. 19th Ave., police said.

One of her legs and one of her arms were outside the vat when she was discovered by a fellow employee, who pulled the body out, Thiss said. Detectives classified the death an accident.

Dan Horton, director of the

state Occupational Safety and Health Division, said chlorothene is an industrial solvent used to clean equipment. The solvent is made by Dow Chemical Co., based in Midland, Mich., Thiss said.

Horton said his office is investigating the incident, adding that Sperry has a good safety record.

The death was the first fatal industrial accident at a Sperry plant in the Valley, said Bill Hiniker, a Sperry spokesman.

If the state occupational-safety inspectors issue a citation against Sperry, the case will go before the state Industrial Commission for a possible fine, he said.

When she died, Myer was performing a procedure in which printed-wiring circuit boards are cleaned, Hiniker said.

The boards are placed on a rack, lowered into 4-foot-deep tanks and sprayed with a solvent, he said. The tank is virtually empty, he said, except for an occasional small accumulation of solvent.

Myer, a three-year employee who worked the 4 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. shift, "somehow fell in" the tank, he said.

Hiniker said that although he did not like to speculate, some boards fell off the rack, and it was possible she was trying to retrieve them.

17600 N. 19th Ave. Phoenix, AZ