

# Worker Crushed by Falling Ice

Incident Date: December 31, 2008 / Location: Mildred Lake, AB / Industry: Oil Sands



**AI Teaching Illustration.** Shows an unstable ice mass after its lower support melts. Shape, position and red exposure zone are schematic.

## What Happened

A process operator was clearing ice so a maintenance crew could repair steam-tracer leaks. A large ice mass had grown from the platform, around a railing and over a manifold box. Steam lances had been left running overnight as ice was melted from the bottom.

The remaining mass became unstable, fell and rotated onto the platform, striking the operator or crushing the worker against railings and pipes. It weighed an estimated 545–727 kilograms. The operator moved toward an access ladder and collapsed. Arriving maintenance workers called for help. Emergency responders took the worker to hospital, where the worker died.

## Why This Became Fatal

**Melting the base removed support from a heavy ice mass.** OHS found no task hazard assessment, effective ice-removal controls or formal training. A written procedure was still being developed. The report could not establish whether the operator had completed a personal field-level risk assessment.

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## What Safe Looks Like

Assess the entire ice mass before changing what supports it.



### 1 Plan the Removal Method

Use a written assessment and a competent removal plan.

### 2 Close the Exposure Area

Keep people out of the drop and rotation zones, including below.

### 3 Control and Reassess

Control leaks and energy. Reassess as ice melts; confirm communication and rescue arrangements.

**AI Teaching Illustration.** Access closed pending an approved method; shown distances are not a design. **LSR links:** Line of Fire; Energy Isolation.

## Investigation Outcome

On **February 17, 2011, Syncrude Canada pleaded guilty**. The penalty was **\$10,000 plus \$1,500 surcharge and \$365,000** to Keyano College for winter-hazard education and bursaries. Other charges were withdrawn. OHS had required a written hazard assessment and controls; Syncrude implemented an ice-removal procedure and training.

## Talk It Through with Your Crew

- 1 Where could ice or another buildup fall or rotate when we remove its support?
- 2 Does our assessment cover the whole mass, its support and the area below?
- 3 What changes overnight or during melting could make the job more dangerous?
- 4 Would you stop or refuse removal work until the method and exclusion zone were confirmed?

### SAFETY COMES FIRST.

**Your Right to Refuse – Alberta.** You may refuse work you reasonably believe presents an undue hazard: a serious and immediate threat. Promptly report the refusal and reasons to your employer or supervisor. They must investigate. Contact Alberta OHS if unresolved. Take reasonable care not to endanger others. You are protected from reprisal.

**Sources:** [Alberta OHS investigation F-74563](#), pp. 5-8; summary completed July 13, 2009. [Alberta conviction record](#), [Alberta refusal guidance](#). Prepared October 19, 2026. LSR links are learning associations, not findings of a breach.

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