

Uniontown grain elevator employee suffers head injury

Kacy Vanpelt of is reported in serious condition at St. Joe's



Tribune/Steve hanks

A stretcher is lowered Monday morning from the top of a Uniontown grain tower (top left) by the Pullman Fire Department ladder truck as a Life Flight helicopter lands to transport a man who became stuck in the elevator. The man was taken to St. Joseph Regional Medical Center at Lewiston with injuries.

By ELIZABETH RUDD of the Tribune

UNIONTOWN - A 33-year-old Uniontown Co-operative Association employee was in serious condition Monday after he was reportedly struck in the head by a dislodged grain tower spade.

Kacy Vanpelt of Uniontown was taken to St. Joseph Regional Medical Center in Lewiston by Life Flight helicopter following his extraction from the base of a grain storage tower, according to the Whitman County Sheriff's Office. Vanpelt, who the Pullman Fire Department said sustained a serious skull fracture, is listed as a warehouse worker for the Uniontown Co-op, according to its website.

Whitman County Fire District No. 14 Chief Jon Dahmen said emergency crews were dispatched at 8:21 a.m. to the co-op, located at 101 E. Owen St. in Uniontown. Personnel arrived to find Vanpelt at the base of a grain tower. Because of the way the tower is built, and his location inside the structure, officials said they had to rescue him by entering at the top of the building.

Dahmen said two crew members were lowered into the tower with Vanpelt through an opening at the top, while four others remained outside to assist in pulling Vanpelt up about 65 feet out of the structure. Crews had to identify anchor points to utilize a rope rescue to hoist Vanpelt from the base, he said. Vanpelt was then placed on a stretcher, located on the Pullman Fire Department's ladder truck platform, after being removed at about 11:10 a.m.

An initial investigation conducted by the sheriff's office indicates Vanpelt was working inside the grain tower when a single spade - used to clean and remove debris from the tower - fell approximately 50 to 60 feet and struck him in the head. According to the sheriff's office, the spade appears to have dislodged from another piece of equipment.

Vanpelt was placed on a Life Flight helicopter minutes after being extracted from the tower. Dahmen said Vanpelt was awake and responsive throughout his removal from the facility.

"He was alert when he was going on the helicopter," he said.

Uniontown Co-op General Manager Neil Nuxoll said the company followed its emergency response protocols when learning of the incident and immediately called 911.

"A bad thing happened, but we got help to him quickly," Nuxoll said.

Dahmen said about 40 emergency responders rushed to the grain tower from agencies including Whitman County Fire District No. 14, the Pullman Fire Department, Lewiston Fire Department, Whitman County Emergency Management and Life Flight. The grain bin rescue team from CHS Primeland in Lewiston also assisted in Vanpelt's recovery.

Rudd may be contacted at erudd@lmtribune.com or (208) 791-8465. Follow her on Twitter @elizabeth_rudd.