



PRESS RELEASE

For Release: 3:00 a.m., September 6, 2011

West Side Worker Drowns After Tractor Plunges Into the Delta-Mendota Canal

Patterson, CA – Tragedy struck early Monday morning when a Patterson area farm employee drowned while at work. Witnesses reported seeing Ernesto Ordonez, 19, of Patterson, plunge into the Delta-Mendota canal while driving a small Bobcat tractor. The area where Ordonez went into the water can best be described as the southern bank of the Delta-Mendota canal, west of Rogers Road, Patterson.

It is unclear what caused Ordonez to drive into the canal, but once in the water witnesses reported never seeing him surface. Fire rescue personnel as well as deputies with the Sheriff's Department initially responded to the scene arriving within minutes of the original dispatched call at 10:27 a.m..

Because Ordonez was reported to never have surfaced once entering the water and after rescue personnel exhausted the search area, it was determined the incident would be downgraded from a rescue operation to a recovery operation.

After interviewing co-workers and other witnesses, it was believed Ordonez was not wearing restraints while driving the tractor. Based on the swift moving water of the Delta-Mendota canal, and the possibility of Ordonez' body being unrestrained in the tractor, the Sheriff's Department determined the risk to divers of the Sheriff's Dive Team outweighed the potential for recovery Ordonez remains. With Ordonez' body moving with the strong current, chances were remote of locating him in the same area as the tractor.

Ordonez' employer utilized the services of a vehicle recovery company which specializes in canal recovery operations. At about 8:00 p.m., while dragging the bottom of the canal, the tractor, along with Ordonez' remains, were located. The area where the body and tractor were located was approximately one mile south of the where Ordonez originally entered the water.

After a careful recovery operation where personnel from the Sheriff's Dive Team were utilized, Ordonez' remains were successfully recovered.

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