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OSHA proposing \$13,500 in fines for Somerset windmill death

Associated Press

MEYERSDALE, Pa. - An Oregon company operating a Somerset County wind farm is facing \$13,500 in federal workplace safety fines stemming from a worker who fell 60 feet to his death in September.

The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration on Thursday announced the fines against Vestas American Wind Technology Inc. of Portland, Ore.

OSHA proposes \$4,500 fines for each of three "serious" violations that OSHA contends led to the death of Niels O. A. Sjolander, 52, of Denmark, on Sept. 13. Sjolander died when a windmill unexpectedly started moving and one of its blades struck a crane, causing Sjolander to fall, authorities said.

The company is contesting the fines, but officials didn't immediately comment on the OSHA sanctions.

OSHA cited Vestas because officials found: Sjolander wasn't wearing a safety harness; the company allegedly failed to discuss work procedures and hazards with workers; workers didn't turn off power to keep the blades from moving.

Sjolander was working for a subsidiary of Denmark-based Vestas Wind Systems A/S, which had contracted with Juno Beach, Fla.-based FPL Energy to repair turbines at FPL's wind farm in Summit Township, about 65 miles southeast of Pittsburgh. The companies are conducting their own internal investigations.

The wind farm is the largest of three in Somerset County, with 20 turbines. The windmills are 262 feet tall with three blades each more than 100 feet long.

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Vestas Americas: <http://www.vestas.com>

FPL Energy: <http://www.fplenergy.com>

Information from: The Tribune-Democrat, <http://www.tribune-democrat.com>