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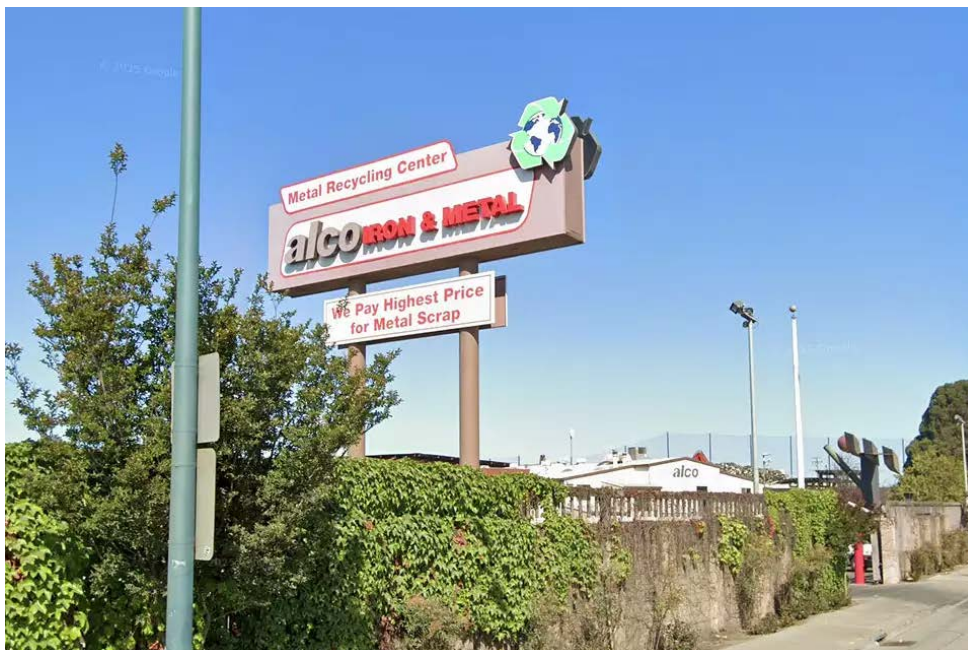


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NEWS | BAY AREA & STATE

Bay Area mechanic crushed by forklift in 3rd death tied to same scrap metal company

By **Olivia Hebert**, News Reporter
May 1, 2025



In January, a mechanic was killed after a forklift fell on him at the Alco Iron & Meal scrap metal yard in San Leandro.
Screenshot via Google Street View




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Bay Area mechanic crushed by forklift in 3rd death tied to same scrap metal company

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A mechanic at a San Leandro metal recycling facility was killed after a forklift fell on top of him earlier this year — one of multiple workplace deaths linked to the same company, Alco Iron & Metal.

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Luis Fernando Guerrero Tlatenchi, a 41-year-old Castro Valley resident, was walking past the front of a broken forklift on Jan. 8 when it suddenly collapsed, pinning him beneath it, KTVU-TV reported Wednesday. Footage obtained by the outlet showed employees rushing to his side moments after he was hit. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration is investigating his death, though records have not been publicly released.

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The death marks the third workplace death reported at an Alco facility in eight years. The company, which operates six scrapyards across San Leandro, Vallejo, San Jose and Stockton, has a history of safety violations and contested fines following workplace fatalities, OSHA records show. In 2022, a worker was killed at the company's Stockton yard when a 4,000-pound bundle of wire fell from a stack and crushed him, according to OSHA records. OSHA fined Alco \$18,000 for the death, but the company appealed — and the fine remains unpaid three years later.

The case was not an outlier. After the 2017 death of a worker involving a collapsed screw conveyor at another of the company's San Leandro locations, OSHA initially fined the company \$45,000. Alco ultimately paid just \$7,000 following a 2022 legal appeal.

In a statement shared with SFGATE, the company said it had retained a mechanical engineering expert who found a manufacturer design flaw was the "sole cause of the [2017] accident." Alco also stated that the employee's family filed a lawsuit against the equipment manufacturer and later settled before trial.

"Alco is devastated by the three incidents," the statement said. "In each instance, Alco cooperated fully with the workplace safety investigations."

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The company emphasized its “robust safety training program,” stating that all employees undergo “rigorous training orientation” when hired, with regular refreshers during their employment. It also said it has provided all required protective gear and cooperated fully with workplace safety investigations.

But Alco’s legal troubles haven’t been limited to OSHA inspections. In 2024, it reached a class action settlement stemming from wage and hour allegations brought by a former employee. The settlement, approved by an Alameda County judge, included \$40,000 in penalties and compensation for about 280 workers employed between 2019 and 2023.

That case came nearly a decade after Alco agreed to a \$750,000 civil settlement with the Alameda County District Attorney’s Office in 2015, resolving allegations that it issued false weighmaster certificates and used improperly maintained commercial scales at one of its San Leandro facilities.

Even with a pattern of serious violations and worker deaths, OSHA's ability to hold employers like Alco accountable remains limited. The agency cannot directly shut down an unsafe business outright — it can only issue citations and propose penalties for safety and health violations. Even in cases of agency of "imminent danger," a court order is required to fully halt operations.

Metal recycling is one of the most hazardous sectors in the country, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Of the 5,283 workplace deaths reported by the agency in 2023, 484 were in waste management and remediation services, which includes scrap metal recycling.

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Olivia Hebert

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Olivia Hebert is a news reporter at SFGATE, where she covers breaking news and a diverse array of topics. Before joining SFGATE, she wrote lifestyle news for the Independent, often exploring the intersection of health, technology, pop culture, travel and style. She's also written entertainment news for Collider, Distractify and StyleCaster. You can reach her at olivia.hebert@sfgate.com.