

Gas fumes kill 3 in Quebec cosmetics factory

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CBC News

Three people died on the weekend after breathing argon gas in a cosmetics factory at Lac Brome, about 100 kilometres east of Montreal in the Eastern Townships.

A 30-year-old Montreal man died Saturday when he was overcome by the gas while welding inside a large metal tank at the factory.

A man and a woman who tried to rescue the victim were also overcome by the gas, and died in hospital on Sunday.

Argon gas by itself is not toxic, but in an enclosed area it can replace all the oxygen, smothering the victims.

The Emballages Knowlton plant produces and packages products such as makeup and shampoo.

Quebec's workplace safety board, the coroner and the provincial police are investigating. Safety board spokesman Antoine Tousignant said the welder was not properly equipped for working in a closed space.

"It's certain that there was a shortage of safety equipment," Tousignant said. "No accident should occur if all the safety rules are followed."

Provincial police Const. Marc Butz said the names of the victims would not be released until he was sure all of the families of the victims had been notified.

With files from the Canadian Press