Acme Smoked Fish hailed for safety measures at North Carolina factory

By Jason Huffman  June 27, 2019 17:58 BST

Employees at Acme Smoked Fish's Wilmington, North Carolina, plant proudly hold up their worker safety award from the state. Photograph provided by Acme Smoked Fish.

Going a step beyond when it comes to forklift safety at its Wilmington, North Carolina, smoked fish factory is just one of the changes that has helped Acme Smoked Fish Corp. win recognition from the state's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (NCOSHA), the company reports.

The site recently became one of 151 in the state to be recognized as being in the Carolina Star Program, which the fourth-generation-owned, Brooklyn, New York-
based company says is equivalent to winning a certification from the federal Voluntary Protection Program.

“It is a very proud day for Acme Smoked Fish to earn this distinction and become a Star Site. To work with employees who go above and beyond in the workplace every day and who prioritize safety helps us run our operation at a gold standard level,” said David Caslow, co-CEO of Acme Smoked Fish, in a statement sent to Undercurrent News.

The application process took two years and involved several audits of the facility, interviews with dozens of employees, a participation in a safety conference, and other activities. The award was presented by Cherie Berry, the state’s labor commissioner, on June 20 on the building’s front lawn.

Acme’s 100,000-square foot Wilmington facility, which processes more than 10 million pounds of cold smoked salmon per year, opened in 2015 to expand the company’s operations beyond Brooklyn and now employs about 200 workers.

According to the North Carolina Department of Labor, there are currently 250,000 employer-based businesses in the state, so the Star Site award is not commonly given.

Acme’s plant is also the only North Carolina Star Site in the seafood industry, the company said.

Acme also won a first-time gold level award from the state’s Department of Labor (NCDOL) and has been granted an AA rating, the highest possible for food and food ingredient manufacturing, processing and packing, from BRC Global Standards.

And about those new procedures for forklifts, more properly known as “powered industrial trucks”, Brandon Sproles, the EHS manager in Wilmington, told Undercurrent that the company trains all of its drivers in house and requires trainers to be certified by a third party, something that NCOSHA doesn’t require. After initial certification, drivers must still have another certified team member around until they are 100% comfortable with the environment.

“I don’t take forklift operation lightly,” Sproles said. “We have narrow aisle ways, freezers to drive in, people to drive around, etc. And it is not just the lift, but the load. So we like to make sure our drivers have a lot of experience before being able to drive on their own.”

Contact the author iason.huffman@undercurrentnews.com
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