



Hobart man killed in U.S. Steel rail accident

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HOBART | Friends and neighbors of Michael M. Shoemaker remembered him Tuesday as a "down to earth great guy."

"I liked Mike. He was just good people," Michael McEachern said of his former friend and landlord.

Shoemaker, 55, of Hobart was killed Monday night after becoming wedged between two rail cars while working at U.S. Steel's Gary Works, officials said.

Shoemaker was pronounced dead at 7:15 p.m. at the scene, according to P.J. Adams, chief deputy coroner for the Lake County coroner's office. The cause of death was listed as blunt force trauma suffered in an industrial accident.

McEachern said he had rented an apartment --- a remodeled garage --- owned by Shoemaker and his mother for the last five years.

Shoemaker and his mother lived in the connecting, neatly-kept white and black house in the 1000 block of East Hickey Street.

McEachern said he and Shoemaker enjoyed swapping stories and a few laughs.

"Mike was a cool guy," McEachern said.

He said Shoemaker had suffered a heart attack, had been off work for a number of months, and had just recently gone back.

Across the street, neighbors Pam Miller and Tom Leonard called the death of Shoemaker both sad and tragic.

They said they did not know much about their neighbor.

"He was very quiet and kept to himself," Leonard said.

According to Courtney Boone, spokeswoman for U.S. Steel, the accident occurred at 5:45 p.m. while Shoemaker was working as a conductor for Gary Railway. Shoemaker worked for Gary Railway for 11 years, Boone said.

"United States Steel Corp., Transtar, Inc. and Gary Railway would like to express sincerest condolences to the family and friends of Michael Shoemaker," she said in a statement issued early Tuesday afternoon.

Boone said no other details surrounding the death are being released, "but an investigation into the incident is under way and Gary Railway is fully cooperating with all agencies involved in the investigation, including the Federal Railroad Administration."

U.S. Steel Gary Works' security, safety department and the Indiana Occupational Safety and Health Administration are investigating.