

Port of Antwerp mourns Anja (46) after fatal workplace accident: “She was a wonderful mom”



ANTWERP – “She was a wonderful mom and an incredible sister.” Herlinda and Els can barely get the words out. Their eldest sister, Anja Aerts, lost her life on Friday in a workplace accident at Quay 118 of Zuidnatie in the Port of Antwerp. She leaves behind two young children.

Nette Loots July 11, 2026 at 8:05 PM

“Anja is irreplaceable. She was cheerful, caring, and always had a positive outlook.” The day after the fatal workplace accident, disbelief and grief prevail among the family and friends of Anja Aerts (46). “She knew the port inside out. The fact that she lost her life

right there is impossible to comprehend. Anja has been torn from our lives—and especially from the lives of her children—far too soon.”

Anja lost her life on Friday shortly after 12:00 PM at Quay 118. She had been working as a marker at Zuidnatie for about a year, having previously worked at PSA for many years. Initial findings indicate she was struck by a forklift. The Labour Inspectorate is investigating the exact circumstances of the accident.

46-year-old Anja Aerts worked as a marker at Zuidnatie.

Her younger sister, Herlinda, happened to be present at the Zuidnatie site at the time of the accident. She was working there as a self-employed contractor on a maintenance job. “Suddenly, I was asked to come to the front of the site immediately and not to go via the quay,” she recounts. “On the way, a man stopped me and grabbed me firmly—so firmly that I told him he was scaring me. In the cafeteria, a Cempa employee told me that Anja had passed away. Afterward, I informed the rest of the family together with the police.”

The news has also hit Zuidnatie particularly hard. “We are a family business and consider every employee part of our Zuidnatie family,” the company stated. “Our thoughts are with her family—especially her two children—and her friends. We are providing the necessary care and support for our colleagues. The safety of our employees remains our top priority.”

“Fantastic mom”

The news spread rapidly through the port on Friday, reaching Kim, a good friend of Anja’s who is also a dockworker. “Yesterday felt like a terrible nightmare,” she says. “But even now, it still hasn’t sunk in that it’s Anja. I keep calling and sending her messages, hoping she might answer after all.”

Solidarity within the port

A sense of devastation is palpable throughout the port. “Every death at the docks is one too many,” says dockworker and PVDA municipal councillor Ivan Heyligen. “On Friday, we spontaneously observed a minute of silence at our quay. Even though I didn’t know Anja personally, a tragedy like this affects all dockworkers. The risk of a serious accident lurks around every corner. I have lost several colleagues myself in workplace accidents. Time and again, you see the immense solidarity within the port when something like this happens.”