

Colorado Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program

SUBJECT:

Colorado FACE Investigation 94CO004

Sign Installer Fatally Injured in 47 Foot Fall from Billboard

SUMMARY:

On January 28, 1994 an employee of an outdoor advertising firm in Colorado was fatally injured when he fell from the billboard on which he was working. In this incident, a crew of three were installing new panels on a billboard. Employee #1 (the deceased) was standing on a walkway 47 feet above ground level. As his co-workers lifted each panel from the billboard framework, Employee #1 would push out on the top of the panel to disengage the retaining clips. Just prior to the fatal fall, coworkers observed Employee #1 at his location on the walkway with his safety lanyard attached to the wire rope life line. It is unknown why he disconnected his safety lanyard. As the co-workers were moving a panel, they heard Employee #1 strike a support bar and observed him falling to the ground.

The Colorado Department of Health (CDH) investigator concluded that to prevent future similar occurrences, employers should:

- Implement 29 CFR 1910.23 (c)(1) that requires the use of guard rails on the use of all open-sided floors or platforms four feet or more above adjacent floor or ground level.
- Develop, implement, and enforce a comprehensive written safety program that includes, but is not limited to, training in fall hazard recognition and the use of fall protection devices.
- Conduct a work-site survey to assess the potential safety hazards. Once an assessment has been completed, written safety rules and procedures should be developed, implemented, and enforced.

INVESTIGATIVE AUTHORITY:

The Colorado Department of Health (CDH) performs investigations of occupational fatalities under the authority of the Colorado Revised Statutes and Board of Health Regulations. CDH is required to establish and operate a program to monitor and investigate those conditions which affect public health and are preventable. The goal of the workplace investigation is to prevent work-related injuries in the future by study of the working environment, the worker, the task the worker was performing, the tools the worker was using, and the role of management in controlling how these factors interact.

This report is generated and distributed to fulfill the Department's duty to provide relevant education to the community on methods to prevent severe occupational injuries.

INVESTIGATION:

The investigation of this work-related fatality was prompted by a local county coroner report of the incident to CDH. The CDH investigator was on site forty-eight hours after the time of the report. The investigation included interviews with coworkers's and the company owner. The incident site was photographed and autopsy, emergency medical service and police reports were obtained from the local authorities.

This company employs twelve people in Colorado. The company owns and maintains the billboard structure. The company has a comprehensive safety program and safety training is conducted on a regular schedule. Safety rules are enforced and repeat violations result in termination of employment.

CAUSE OF DEATH:

The cause of death as determined by autopsy and listed on the death certificate was multiple fractures and transection of the thoracic aorta.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION:

Recommendation #1: Implement 29 CFR 1910.23 (c)(1) which requires the use of guard rails on the use of all open-sided floor or platforms four feet or more above the adjacent floor or ground level.

Discussion: The walkways on this billboard structure did not have any guard rails. Some walkway sections were equipped with lifelines while other sections were totally unguarded and did not have a lifeline where a safety lanyard could be attached.

Recommendation #2: Develop, implement, and enforce a comprehensive written safety program that includes, but is not limited to, training in fall hazard recognition and the use of fall protection devices.

Discussion: Employers should emphasize safety of their employees by designing, developing, implementing and enforcing a comprehensive safety program to prevent incidents such as this. The safety program should include, but not be limited to, the recognition and avoidance of fall hazards and the use of appropriate fall protection.

Recommendation #3: The employer should conduct a work-site survey to assess the potential safety hazards. Once an assessment has been completed, written safety rules and procedures should be developed, implemented, and enforced.

Discussion: According to the General Duty Clause of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (Section 5 (a) 1), employers are required to provide a safe and healthy workplace for employees. To do so, employers must regularly survey the workplace to identify hazards. All identified hazards must be adequately addressed through engineering control measures or changes in work-practices. Employers should instruct each employee in the recognition and avoidance of unsafe conditions. In this and similar situations, the employer may need to provide additional training to ensure that employees understand the hazard and how to properly use equipment.

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Lyle E. McKenzie  
Chief Investigator/Industrial Hygienist  
Environmental Epidemiology Division  
Occupational Epidemiology Program

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Jane B. McCammon, M.S., CIH  
Manager  
Occupational Epidemiology Program

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Richard E. Hoffman, M.D., MPH  
State Epidemiologist  
Colorado Department of Health

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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