

FACE Investigation 90C0033

SUBJECT: Antenna Technician Dies after Falling 310 Feet from a Television Tower to the Ground.

SUMMARY:

A 37-year-old antenna technician died as a result of injuries sustained in a 310-foot fall from a television transmitting tower. The victim was lead foreman of a three man crew contracted to repair an antenna dish. The crew had just completed the climb to the 310-foot level and were securing equipment when the victim mis-connected his safety belt, failed to check the connect and then let go of the structural steel and fell to his death. The Colorado Department of Health investigator concluded that, in order to prevent future similar occurrences, employers should:

- \*ensure that workers comply with existing safety policies and procedures at all times
- \* consider and address worker safety in the planning phase of projects.
- \* develop, implement, and enforce a comprehensive safety program that includes, but is not limited to, training in fall hazard recognition and the use of fall protection devices.

INTRODUCTION:

On June 25, 1990 a 37-year-old antenna technician died of injuries sustained when he fell 310 feet from a television transmitter tower. Under the terms of a cooperative agreement, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Denver Area Office notified the Colorado Department of Health (CDH) of the death and an investigation was initiated. Representatives of the company were contacted and reports were obtained from the local police department and the county coroner.

The employer in this incident is an independent tower construction firm that has been in business for over 16 years and employs 7 workers including 2 antenna technicians. The company has a written safety policy or a designated safety officer. On-the-job training for employees is supplemented by review of technical manuals. The victim had worked for the company for 54 months.

#### INVESTIGATION:

The victim was lead foreman of a three man crew contracted to repair an antenna dish on the television transmitting tower. At approximately 0115 hours the victim and his coworkers had climbed to the 310 foot level and were securing equipment. The victim had secured his radio and a manual operated winch when a coworker heard what he described as a clipping noise, such as that made by a safety belt clip being attached. He looked over and the victim was gone and a short time later he heard the subject hit the ground. The coworkers descended the tower and called 911. The victim was pronounced dead at the scene.

Standard practice calls for testing the connection of the safety line prior to releasing a grip on the structural steel. It appears that the victim did not test his connection prior to putting his full weight on belt.

#### CAUSE OF DEATH:

Massive head and internal injuries as a consequence of the fall were listed as the cause of death following autopsy. The toxicological screening revealed that the victim had an elevated blood alcohol level.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION:

Recommendation #1: Employers should continually stress to all employees the importance of following established safety rules and procedures at all times.

Discussion: In accordance with the OSHA Act, P.L. 91-596, Section 5(b). "each employee shall comply with occupational safety and health standards and all rules, regulations, and orders... which are applicable to his own actions and conduct." The employer in this incident managed a comprehensive and detailed safety program on the project that addressed the hazards to which his employees could reasonably expect to be exposed. The fact the incident occurred in spite of these policies clearly shows the need for employers to continually remind all employees of the importance of following established safety rules and procedures at all times.

Recommendation #2: Employers should develop, implement, and enforce a comprehensive written safety program.

Discussion: Employers should emphasize the safety of their employees by developing, implementing and enforcing a comprehensive safety program. The safety program should include , but not be limited to, training workers in the proper selection and use of PPE, along with the recognition and avoidance of fall hazards.

Recommendation #3: Employers should address worker safety in the planning phase of all construction and maintenance projects.

Discussion: Worker safety issues should be discussed and incorporated into all projects during the planning and throughout the entire project. The planning for and incorporation of safety measures, prior to any work being performed at job sites, will help to identify potential worker hazards so that preventive measures can be implemented at the site.

#### REFERENCE

(1) Public Law 91-596, December 29, 1970, the "Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970", Section 5(b).

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