

FACE Investigation 90CO027

SUBJECT: Part-time Cable Vision Camera Operator Dies from Injuries Received in Fall from Scaffolding

SUMMARY:

A 57-year-old part time cable vision camera operator died at a local hospital from injuries sustained in a 6-foot fall from scaffolding. The victim had been filming a parade as part of a video news article. Upon completion of the event, members of the film crew were assisting in the dismantling of the rented scaffold. While she assisted in dismantling the scaffold that had been utilized as the camera platform, the victim stepped back into a gap between two sheets of plywood and fell 6 feet striking her head on a concrete curb. The Colorado Department of Health (CDH) investigator concluded that, in order to prevent future similar occurrences, employers should:

- * secure platform to the scaffold or overlap ends a minimum of 12 inches
- * install guardrails, approximately 42 inches in height, on all open sides and ends of scaffolds.
- * develop, implement, and enforce a comprehensive safety program that includes , but is not limited to, training in fall hazard recognition and usage of scaffolding.

INTRODUCTION:

On May 5, 1990 a 57-year-old cable vision camera operator sustained fatal head injuries from a 6-foot fall. The victim was assisting in the dismantling of a portable scaffold that had been utilized as a camera platform to film a local parade.

A routine screening of state death certificates by CDH for work related fatalities prompted the investigation of this fatal injury. The company was contacted and reports were obtained from the local police department, ambulance service, county coroner, and hospital. Copies of witness statements were also utilized in this investigation.

INVESTIGATION:

This privately owned cable vision company has been in operation for 12 years and employs up to 10 workers, some of whom are temporary employees. The company does not have a designated safety officer or written safety program.

On the day of the incident, a scaffold had been erected to serve as a camera platform. The victim was a member of the crew assigned to film the parade. After filming the event the film crew assisted in dismantling the scaffold. Two 4' by 8' sheets of plywood had been placed on the scaffold as a floor. During the activity on the scaffold the sheets of plywood had separated creating a gap. The victim stepped backwards into this space and lost her balance and fell striking the back of her head on a concrete curb. Emergency medical personnel were summoned and arrived 13 minutes after receiving the call. The victim was transported to the local hospital and arrived 28 minutes after the initial call for the ambulance. After stabilization the patient was transferred to a trauma center where she died 46 hours later.

CAUSE OF DEATH:

The cause of death was determined by autopsy and listed as cerebral contusion due to extensive calvarial fractures as a consequence of the fall.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION:

Recommendation #1: Overlap all planking of platforms a minimum of 12 inches or secure from movement.

Discussion: The employer should implement 29 CFR 1926.451 (a)(11) which requires that "all planking of platforms shall be overlapped (minimum 12 inches), or secured from movement." The movement of the platform sheeting created an unprotected opening that the victim stepped into.

Recommendation #2: Install guardrails on all open sides and ends of the platform.

Discussion: The employer should implement 29 CFR 1926.451 (a)(4) which requires that scaffolds of 4 feet to 10 feet in height shall have standard guardrails installed on all open sides and ends of the platform. In this incident the presence of such a guardrail could have provided a barrier to prevent the victim from falling off the scaffold.

Recommendation #3: 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 use scaffolds, along with the recognition an avoidance of fall hazards.

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