

## **Self-Employed Massachusetts Siding Installer Dies After 11 Foot Fall from Scaffold**

**Investigation: #96-MA-027-01**

**Release Date: December 2, 1997**

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### **SUMMARY**

On June 20, 1996 a 65 year old male self-employed roofer and siding installer was fatally injured when he fell almost 11 feet from a pump jack scaffold. The victim had been installing wood clapboard siding on a newly constructed single family home. It is possible that the victim suffered a heart attack before falling to the ground. A co-worker, his son, had returned from placing some tools in the truck when he found the victim on the ground. The victim suffered severe head injuries in the fall and was transported to the local community hospital emergency room where he died. The MA FACE Field Investigator concluded that to prevent similar future occurrences, employers and self-employed contractors, should:

- c use fall protection systems, either guardrails or fall-arresting equipment, whenever work is performed over 6 feet above the ground**

### **INTRODUCTION**

On June 24, 1996, the MA FACE Program was notified by a town clerk through the occupational fatality hotline that on June 20, 1996, a 65 year old male roofing and siding installer was fatally injured when he fell almost 11 feet from a scaffold at a residential construction site. An investigation was immediately initiated. The MA FACE Program Director traveled to the jobsite on June 28, 1996. The fire department report, death certificate and photographs were obtained during the course of the investigation.

The employer was a self-employed roofing and siding contractor. The victim had no employees, but his son worked with him. The victim and his son were the only workers on site at the time of the incident. The field investigator was not able to locate the son to interview him.

### **INVESTIGATION**

On June 20, 1996, a two-person crew, including the victim, had been installing wood clapboard siding to a newly-constructed single family dwelling. The building was two and one-half stories high with an attached two-car garage. Pump jack scaffolds had been erected on each end of the building. One scaffold, at the garage end of the

residence, had been mostly disassembled. The scaffold which had been used by the victim was constructed of metal pump jack brackets secured to 2 by 4 's fastened together as poles. No guardrails or toeboards were in place along the scaffold. The poles were secured to the building by triangle braces near the roof and by wood strapping approximately 8 feet from the ground. The platform was constructed of two 2 by 4's covered by a plywood sheet cut approximately 14 inches wide and approximately 22 feet long. The plywood was worn and cracked in some areas. The poles were 17 feet 2 inches apart. The platform was 10 feet 9 inches from the ground.

The victim was on the scaffold platform, installing clapboard on one end of the house. Approximately one-half of the siding was completed on that wall. From the site investigation, it appears that his co-worker had been installing the clapboards on the opposite side of the dwelling. According to the fire department report, at the time of the incident the co-worker had gone to the truck to put away some tools. Upon his return, the co-worker found the victim on the ground and unresponsive. The co-worker called the fire department emergency number.

It appears that the victim had a heart attack which caused him to lose his balance and fall from the scaffold. Emergency responders noticed that he had not used his arms or hands to break his fall. The victim suffered severe head injuries in the fall. Emergency medical technicians found him unconscious and unresponsive and immediately transported him to the local community hospital emergency room where he died.

## **CAUSE OF DEATH**

The medical examiner listed the cause of death as blunt head trauma. A significant condition contributing to death, but not resulting in an underlying cause, was left ventricular hypertrophy.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION**

**Recommendation #1: Employers should use fall protection systems, either guardrails or fall-arresting equipment, whenever work is performed over 6 feet above the ground**

**Discussion:** Although the victim fell from the scaffold due to a possibly non-work-related condition, he may not have died had he not fallen. There are many medical conditions that may cause workers to become dizzy and faint while working. Protecting workers from falling under these circumstances can be accomplished by providing guardrails on all sides of the scaffold platform in accordance with Dept. of Labor - OSHA Standard 1926.452 (y)(11). In the absence of guardrails, fall arresting equipment, such as safety harnesses and lifelines, should be supplied and worn.

## **REFERENCES**

**American National Standards Institute, Scaffolding - safety requirements, ANSI A10.80-1988**

**Office of the Federal Register: Code of Federal Regulations, Labor 29 Parts 1926.452(y)(11); 1926.451(a)(15)**