

Electrician Dies After Falling From Cherry Picker Basket

December 23, 1999

SUMMARY

A 41-year-old male electrician (victim) died after he fell from the basket of an aerial lift truck. The victim and two coworkers were installing electrical wiring for a sign on the side of a highway bridge. The two left most traffic lanes were closed to traffic. The workers arrived at the scene with a pickup truck and a truck equipped with a basket-type work platform attached to a hydraulic boom. After arriving at the site the victim entered the basket, swung it beneath the bridge and raised it up between two of the bridge beams. The victim determined the length of steel pipe needed for the electrical wires and verbally told his coworkers the required length of pipe. At this time the basket was positioned above the closed traffic lanes. While the coworkers cut the pipe, the victim apparently moved the basket to a location above the nearest open traffic lane.

A semi-truck approached the site and observed warning cones and signs directing traffic to merge to the right. The driver proceeded toward the work site in the open traffic lane nearest the closed lanes. When the truck neared the workers vehicles, the driver noticed the basket over the traffic lane in which he was driving. Before the driver could slow the truck or safely move to the next lane, the semi-truck struck the cherry basket. The collision caused the victim to be thrown from the basket to the surface of the roadway. The coworkers heard the collision and looked as the victim fell. They used a cell phone to place a call to emergency personnel. Emergency personnel arrived shortly after being notified and pronounced the victim dead at the scene. MN FACE investigators concluded that, in order to reduce the likelihood of similar occurrences, the following guidelines should be followed:

- **all workers and equipment should remain or be kept within the boundaries of established work zones.**

INTRODUCTION

On April 3, 1999, MN FACE investigators were notified of a work-related fatality that occurred on April 2, 1999 on an interstate highway in a major metropolitan area. The state patrol was contacted and a releasable copy of their report of the incident was obtained. A site investigation was not conducted by MN FACE investigators. During MN FACE investigations, incident

information is obtained from a variety of sources such as law enforcement agencies, county coroners and medical examiners, employers, coworkers and family members.

INVESTIGATION

This incident occurred at approximately 12:20 A.M. near a bridge along a multi-lane interstate highway. Although rain had fallen earlier in the evening, authorities who immediately responded to the scene concluded that wet road conditions did not contribute to the occurrence of the incident. The victim and two coworkers were installing electrical wiring for a changeable message sign that had been installed the previous night on the side of a bridge. At the location of the incident, the five lane wide interstate highway consisted of four travel lanes and an entrance lane for vehicles entering the highway from the right side. The three left most lanes when viewed looking in the direction of travel were closed to traffic at the time. Traffic was diverted from the closed lanes by colored roadway warning cones and lighted arrow signs were used to direct vehicles to the right as they approached the work area. The lane closures were established before the electrical workers arrived at the scene to install the wiring for the message sign.

The victim and his coworkers arrived at the scene with a pickup truck and a truck equipped with a bucket-type work platform attached to a hydraulic boom, commonly referred to as a "cherry picker" basket. The position and movement of the basket was determined and controlled by levers that were operated by the worker inside the basket. The pickup was parked in the far left lane and the truck was positioned near the bridge in the third lane from the left side of the road.

Shortly after arriving at the work site the victim entered the basket, swung it beneath the bridge and then raised the basket and himself up between two of the bridge beams. After positioning the basket between the beams, the victim determined the length of steel conduit pipe needed for the electrical wires. After determining the pipe length, he verbally informed his coworkers of the required steel pipe length. At this time the basket and the victim were safely positioned above the closed traffic lanes. The coworkers turned to the pickup and began to measure and cut a piece of pipe. While the coworkers were cutting the pipe, the victim apparently changed the position of the basket which resulted in it being in a location above the nearest open traffic lane.

A large semi-truck loaded with 62,000 pounds of freight approached the work site and observed the warning cones and signs directing traffic to merge to the right. The driver proceeded at a speed of approximately 60 miles per hour toward the work site in the open traffic lane nearest the two closed lanes. When the truck was about 50 feet from the workers vehicles, the driver noticed that the cherry basket was positioned over the traffic lane that he was driving lane. Before the driver could slow the truck or safely move to the next lane to his right, the top of the truck cab struck the bottom of the cherry basket. The impact of the collision caused the victim to be thrown from the basket to the surface of the roadway. The coworkers on the ground heard the collision and looked as the victim fell. They used a cell phone to place a call to emergency medical personnel. Emergency personnel arrived at the scene shortly after being notified and pronounced the victim dead from massive head injuries.

CAUSE OF DEATH

The cause of death listed on the death certificate was blunt force craniocerebral injuries due to fall from height.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

Recommendation #1: All workers and equipment should remain or be kept within the boundaries of established work zones.

Discussion: Many work environments, especially those involving any type of construction work, require the establishment of a dedicated work zone. Established work zones provide an increased level of safety for workers while inside the zone and for non-workers outside the zone who are near or who may approach the work zone. In this incident, several lanes of an interstate highway were closed to traffic to provide an established work zone for the victim and his co-workers to safely install electrical wiring for a changeable traffic message sign. However, an open traffic lane in which cars and trucks were traveling at speeds of 50-60 miles per hour was adjacent to one side of the established work zone. The victim became exposed to hazardous conditions and an increased risk of injury when the "cherry picker" basket moved outside the established work zone, stopped at a position above the open traffic lane and was struck by the cab of a passing semi-truck.

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