

**DATE:** January 24, 1997

**FROM:** Minnesota Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (MN FACE)  
Program Minnesota Department of Health

**SUBJECT:** MN FACE Investigation 96MN08501  
Construction Worker Dies After Falling 13 Feet From A Scaffold

### **SUMMARY**

A 20-year-old construction worker (victim) died of injuries he sustained after falling 13 feet from a tubular welded scaffold. On the day of the incident workers were completing a several month project that involved the construction of a one-story office building. The installation of rain gutters was the final part of the project. The worker had been on the scaffold for 3 to 5 minutes before he fell to the asphalt pavement. It is unknown why the victim was not wearing fall protection at the time of the fall. Although the fall was not witnessed by any of the victim's coworkers, a worker on the opposite end of the scaffold noticed that the victim had fallen. A 911 call was placed to emergency rescue personnel who responded within minutes. The victim was taken by ambulance to a local hospital where he died six days later.

MN FACE investigators concluded that, in order to reduce the likelihood of similar occurrences, the following guidelines should be followed:

- whenever any work is performed at an elevation where the potential for a serious or fatal fall exists, the employer should ensure that fall protection equipment is provided and used by all employees; and
- employers should design, develop, and implement a comprehensive safety program.

### **INTRODUCTION**

On November 4, 1996, MN FACE investigators were notified of a work-related fatal incident that

occurred on October 28, 1996. An interview with the employer's director of safety was conducted by a MN FACE investigator on December 6, 1996. 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.

The victim worked for a steel erection company. The company erects steel framing on buildings of any size, builds bridges and places large equipment for industrial plants. They install reinforcement bars and post-tensioning strands in concrete, and erect metal wall panels, curtain walls, architectural and structural precast concrete. They have offices located in two other states. The company has been in business for 35 years and employs 370 workers. The employer has a safety program and a safety director who dedicates 100% of his work time to safety. The victim had worked for the company for 6 years.

## **INVESTIGATION**

The victim was working on the construction of a one-story office building. The building had been under construction for several months and was nearing completion. Completion of the project required installing rain gutters on the building. The victim had worked at the incident site for 15 days.

On the day of the incident, the victim and a coworker were installing 75 linear feet of rain gutters on an addition of the building. The workers were standing on a tubular welded scaffold elevated to a height of 13 feet in order to reach the roofline of the building. The platform of the scaffold measured 14 feet across.

The victim had been working from the ground on the preceding day and on the morning of the incident. The victim needed to be on the scaffold in order to assist a coworker in the installation of a rain gutter. The victim had been on the scaffold for 3 to 5 minutes before he fell to the asphalt pavement. Although fall protection was available at the incident site, and the victim had received training in the area of falls that morning, it is unknown why he was not wearing fall protection at the time of the fall. The fall was not witnessed by any of the victim's coworkers. The worker that the victim was assisting immediately noticed that the victim had fallen and called for help. A 911 call was placed to emergency rescue personnel who responded within minutes. The victim was taken by ambulance to a local hospital where he died six days later.

## **CAUSE OF DEATH**

The cause of death listed on the death certificate was cerebral edema with herniation due to closed head trauma due to fall.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION**

**Recommendation #1:** Whenever any work is performed at an elevation where the potential for a serious or fatal fall exists, the employer should ensure that fall protection equipment is provided and used by all employees.

**Discussion:** The victim was working 13 feet above ground in an area where the potential for a fall existed. The Code of Federal Regulations (29CFR 1926.28 (a)) states that "the employer is responsible for requiring the wearing of appropriate personal protective equipment in all operations where there is an exposure to hazardous conditions." Although the employer in this incident required the use of fall protection when workers were working at elevations above 6 feet, it is unknown why the victim was not wearing fall protection at the time of the fall. If the victim had been wearing fall protection, this fatality may have been prevented.

**Recommendation #2:** Employers should design, develop, and implement a comprehensive safety program.

**Discussion:** Employers should ensure that all employees are trained to recognize and avoid hazardous work conditions. A comprehensive safety program should address all aspects of safety related to specific tasks that employees are required to perform. OSHA Standard 1926.21(b)(2) requires employers to "instruct each employee in the recognition and avoidance of unsafe conditions and the regulations applicable to his work environment to control or eliminate any hazards or other exposure to illness or injury." Safety rules, regulations, and procedures should include the recognition and elimination of hazards associated with tasks performed by employees.

## **REFERENCES**

1. Office of the Federal Register: Code of Federal Regulations, Labor, 29 CFR part 1926.21 (b)(2), 29 CFR part 1926.28(a) U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Washington, D.C., July 1, 1994.

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