



The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

Promoting productive workplaces  
through safety and health research / **NIOSH**

# Hotel Grounds Maintenance Man Dies After 16-Foot Fall From Ladder in South Carolina

FACE 9401

## SUMMARY

A 53-year-old male hotel grounds maintenance man (the victim) died after falling 16 feet from a ladder and striking his head on a concrete parking lot surface. The victim and a co-worker were trimming palm trees and shrubbery located on a concrete island in the hotel parking lot. The victim was using pruning shears to trim the trees while working from a 32-foot aluminum extension ladder 16 feet above ground. The co-worker was facing away from the victim while trimming shrubs at ground level. The co-worker heard a thud and turned to see the victim lying on his back in the concrete parking lot. The co-worker ran to the victim, who was not breathing, and initiated cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). A worker exiting the hotel office saw the co-worker administering CPR and told management personnel in the office to summon the emergency medical squad (EMS). The victim was transported to the local hospital, then transferred to a major trauma center where he died 4 days later. NIOSH investigators concluded that, to prevent similar occurrences, employers should:

- **stress to all employees the importance of exercising caution when working from ladders**
- **develop and implement a comprehensive written safety program.**

## INTRODUCTION

On October 23, 1993, a 53-year-old hotel grounds maintenance man (the victim) died of injuries sustained in a 16-foot fall from an aluminum extension ladder on October 19, 1993. On October 28, 1993, officials of the South Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Administration (SCOSHA) notified the Division of Safety Research (DSR) of this fatality, and requested technical assistance. On December 20, 1993, a safety specialist from DSR investigated the incident and reviewed the incident with a company representative, and the SCOSHA compliance officer and supervisor assigned to the case.

The victim had been employed at a resort hotel as a grounds maintenance man and painter. The hotel had been in operation for 30 years and employed 40 workers. The employer had no written safety program or procedures; however, training was provided on the job. Maintenance workers were provided with safety glasses and gloves. This was the first fatality experienced by the employer.

## INVESTIGATION

The victim and co-worker began work daily at 6 a.m. by hosing down and straightening up the area around the outdoor swimming pool. On the day of the incident, after these tasks were completed, the two men were instructed to trim three 25-foot-high palm trees and the shrubbery located on an island in the hotel parking lot.

At approximately 7:45 a.m., the victim, working from a 32-foot aluminum extension ladder, began to trim the palm trees (using pruning shears), while the co-worker remained at ground level to trim the shrubbery.

Two trees were trimmed without incident. As the co-worker continued trimming the shrubbery, with his back to the victim, he heard the victim positioning the aluminum extension ladder against the third tree. The co-worker turned to see the victim climb to the 16-foot level, then turned back to his work. He immediately heard a thud, then the sound of the ladder striking the parking lot. He turned to see the victim lying on his back in the concrete parking lot, 10 feet from the base of the tree. The co-worker ran to the victim, who was not breathing, and initiated cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). A worker exiting the hotel office noticed the co-worker administering CPR to the victim and told management personnel to summon the emergency medical service (EMS). The EMS arrived within 5 minutes and transported the victim to the local hospital. The victim was transferred to a major trauma center where he died 4 days later.

## CAUSE OF DEATH

The attending physician listed the cause of death as closed-head trauma.

## RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

**Recommendation #1: Employers should stress to all employees the importance of exercising caution when working from ladders.**

Discussion: The event was unwitnessed but evidence suggests that the ladder and victim fell together away from the tree. The ladder in this incident was clean and there was no evidence of a foreign substance that might have been a factor in the incident. Employers should constantly stress to employees the importance of exercising caution when climbing or working from ladders, and should ensure that employees adhere to 29 CFR 1910.26 (c)(3)(iv), which regulates the proper use of extension ladders. Additionally, a strap or rope cradle could be used to fasten a ladder to an uneven surface, such as the tree in this incident.

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

Discussion: Enforcement of this safety program should reduce and/or eliminate worker exposures to hazardous situations. The safety program should include, but not be limited to, ladder safety, the use of safety equipment, and the recognition and avoidance of fall hazards.

## REFERENCES

29 CFR 1910.26 (c)(3)(iv) Code of Federal Regulations, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, Office of the Federal Register.

[Return to In-house FACE reports](#)

Last Reviewed: November 18, 2015

Was this page helpful?

Yes

Partly

No