

# NIOSH – A Resource For Occupational Health and Safety Support

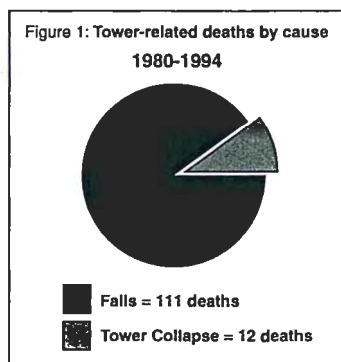
By: Virgil Casini, Division of Safety Research and T.J. Lentz, Education & Information Division

Rapid changes in wireless technology affect the way people live, work and play. Cellular phones, high definition television and personal communication permeate our workplaces and personal lives. As a result, there is an incredible demand for erecting and maintaining towers to hold a variety of transmitting devices. With more towers, there is also growing concern for the health and safety of tower workers. The National Association of Tower Erectors, with more than five times as many member companies today as it had only three years ago in 1995 (340 versus 67), encourages safe work practices in the tower industry, and supports the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in developing a Task force to address hazards of tower work. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is another key player with a mission to protect tower workers. NIOSH has a history of more than 25 years of promoting workplace safety and health.

NIOSH was created by the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 which also established OSHA. While both NIOSH and OSHA were set up by the OSH Act, they are separate agencies with different duties. OSHA is in the U.S. Department of Labor and is charged with creating and enforcing workplace safety and health regulations. NIOSH is in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and is a research agency charged with communicating health and safety to workers. Despite having different missions, both NIOSH and OSHA work together toward the common goal of protecting worker safety and health.

This is exactly the case with the tower

industry. NIOSH has worked with others on the OSHA Task force to develop compliance directives for the tower industry. In November 1997, NIOSH researchers joined the OSHA Tower Task force and the NATE Board of Directors in visiting two tower sites and a tower manufacturer. NIOSH also maintains a national database which keeps track of work-related deaths in the U.S. (known as the National Traumatic Occupational Fatality surveillance system, or NTOF). The NIOSH NTOF system lists information on 123 tower-related deaths which occurred between 1980 and 1994. Most of these tower workers died from falling off towers, from heights of 20 to 1,500 feet. About ten percent of the deaths were for workers who were killed when the tower they were on collapsed. The breakdown is shown in Figure 1. These preventable deaths of tower workers cost the industry more than \$14 million per year, not counting the costs of pain and suffering for families and co-workers.



NIOSH researchers investigate tower-related fatalities to find ways that tower deaths could have been prevented. Within the past year, NIOSH investigated six incidents where workers were killed during tower work. Each investigation results in a brief, written report describing the conditions at the work

site, the task the worker was performing, the tools the worker was using, and other factors which might have led to the fatality. Recommendations are presented to prevent other worker deaths in similar work conditions. The reports are provided to the employer of the deceased worker, and are also available to the public. Many of the hazards discovered during these investigations are already being confronted by NATE through fall protection, guidelines for safe access to tower work stations, limiting RF (radiofrequency) exposure, and inspection of hoist systems and gin poles. It is important that more tower workers and their employers are aware of the hazards of tower work and take caution to avoid them.

Summaries of the NIOSH investigations will be provided in future articles to emphasize how safe procedures and hazard controls can prevent other injuries and deaths.

Besides performing research and fatality investigations, NIOSH visits work sites when requested by employers or employees. These health hazard evaluations produce useful information on workplace hazards and practical recommendations to correct or avoid them. NIOSH also provides a variety of free publications and information on various workplace hazards. Many documents cover topics related to tower construction including:

- heat and cold stress
- musculoskeletal disorders
- RF radiation
- falls in construction
- personal protective equipment

*(continued on page 37)*

## ▲ Membership Committee Update (continued from page 31)

represent the activities that fascinate us. But a tower association?

When someone unfamiliar with the NATE identifier says, "Oh, I never knew there was a tower association," my general response, "Well, why wouldn't there be?"

So, the next time someone asks you about your association and why it exists, remember that we are a group of very different individuals who are dedicated to providing a service that is often underappreciated.

For most of us, however, it makes perfect sense that there is a tower association, and it is made up of quality companies and individuals that clearly separate it from any other. ▲

## ▲ Trade Show Committee Update (continued from page 33)

Cyndi Smith Lamphear, Gerhard Schwebler, Therese O'Brien, Craig Lekutis, Ron Romano, Barbara Houdek, Andy Thimler, Patrick Shea and Larry Montuori. The booklet highlighting the 4th Annual NATE Conference and Exposition will be distributed in mid-October. It contains information on the daily agenda, keynote speaker, educational sessions, exposition, accommodations, registration information, and the annual golf tournament.

One final thought: if you haven't done any of the following – registered for NATE '99, made reservations for NATE '99, reserved booth space for NATE '99, sent an underwriting check for NATE '99, or contacted someone you know who should be at NATE '99 – do it now!

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(continued from page 35)

Many NIOSH products are available in multimedia formats (video, CD-ROM, computer disk), and technical support is provided by operators at the NIOSH 800 number (1-800-35-NIOSH). Callers may speak with a technical information specialist or publications representative on weekdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. (EST). The 800 number also operates 24 hours per day, 7 days per week to provide automated information.

With headquarters in Washington, D.C., NIOSH also has offices in Atlanta (GA) and research divisions in Cincinnati (OH), Morgantown (WV), Brucetown (PA), and Spokane (WA). For specific information about NIOSH involvement with tower issues, contact Virgil Casini [Division of Safety Research, (304) 285-6020], or T.J. Lentz [Education and Information Division, (513) 533-8260]. To request NIOSH publications or answers to questions about workplace safety and health, call the number below or visit the NIOSH homepage on the World Wide Web.

**1-800-35-NIOSH (1-800-356-4674)**

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html> ▲

### In Memoriam

*Editor's note: Recognizing that the tower erecting, service, and maintenance industry is relatively small and close knit, it is important that we offer a venue for the expression of sympathy and support to the friends and families of those who are no longer with us.*



#### WEBSTER GREGG FAWTHROP

Gregg was the founder of Lightning Prevention Systems of Berlin, New Jersey. He started out in the broadcasting industry designing AM transmitters. His innovative engineering designs were respected by all.

Gregg's fascination with lightning grew while seeing its destruction on tower sites. This led him to develop a static dissipater that could take the lightning attractive charge off the tower or structure.

Gregg will be missed dearly by family and friends.



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