

WORK-RELATED FALLS



Oklahoma Occupational Safety and Health Surveillance Program

Unintentional falls are the third leading cause of deaths in the workplace. Each year, an average of 14 workers experience a fatal fall while on-the-job in Oklahoma. In 2006, workers' compensation paid for over 300 inpatient hospital stays due to fall-related injuries. Falls, whether on the same level or at great heights, have the potential to cause severe injuries regardless of industry or occupation. The leading types of fatal falls are falls from buildings, scaffolds, and ladders. Industries at greatest risk include construction, telecommunications, and oil and gas.

- A worker was preparing to roof a home under construction. While on the roof receiving and stacking bundles of shingles from a truck conveyor belt, the worker lost his balance, slid to the end of the roof, and fell 10-15 feet to the ground. An 80-pound bundle of shingles fell with him and landed on his chest. The worker died two hours later at the hospital.
- A mechanic was replacing a rear hatch on a tank truck using a cutting torch to remove the hinge pin. The torch ignited flammable vapors in the tank, which had been emptied of salt water contents from a gas well. The explosion blew the hatch off the tank and it struck the worker, causing him to fall. He was dead from head trauma on arrival to the hospital.

- A rancher was working alone on his barn screwing sheet metal to the top of the barn. He was 9-feet, 3-inches above a concrete floor when he fell between the metal and struck his head on the floor. He died at the scene from a compound skull fracture.
- A fitness center worker went out the back of the building to smoke a cigarette. Upon leaving the doorway, the worker missed a step and fell backwards, striking her head on the step. She was diagnosed with a skull fracture and brain bleed and died after three days in the hospital.
- A custodial manager was applying stripper to the floors of his workplace, causing them to be extremely slick. In the process of working, he slipped and fell on a sloping part of the floor and struck his head on the ground. He died two days later at the hospital.

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The Oklahoma Occupational Safety and Health Surveillance Program collects statewide information on 19 occupational health conditions in order to develop and inform occupational injury and illness prevention programs. Oklahoma's occupational surveillance system is a research program of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

For detailed reports, please go to the
Occupational Injuries section at:
<http://ips.health.ok.gov>

SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Control slip and trip hazards in work areas by using signage and/or barriers for slick or uneven surfaces and increasing awareness of the impact of weather conditions (e.g., wind, rain, snow, and ice).*
- *Designate controlled access zones and install appropriate fall protection systems (e.g., guardrails, safety nets, personal fall arrest, etc.), particularly around skylights, roof and floor openings, towers, and other heights.*
- *Ensure that all necessary personal protective equipment is provided and worn/used correctly (e.g., safety belts, harnesses, lanyards, lifelines, hard hats, etc.).*
- *Train personnel in hazard recognition and avoidance, in addition to safely using, inspecting, and reporting problems with all fall protection systems.*
- *Consult and implement published best practices and OSHA standards.*