

F.A.C.E. INVESTIGATION REPORT

Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation Project

FACE #94-NJ-124-01
Handy Man Dies After Falling
25 Feet From a House Roof



New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services
Occupational Disease and Injury Services
P.O. Box 360
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0360
(609) 984-1863

TO: Division of Safety Research
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health
Morgantown, West Virginia

FROM: Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Project
New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH)

SUBJECT: FACE Investigation #94-NJ-124-01
Handy Man Dies After Falling 25 Feet From a House Roof

DATE: May 15, 1995

SUMMARY

On September 19, 1994, a 43 year-old self-employed handy man died after falling 25 feet from a house roof. The incident occurred while the victim was installing aluminum siding on the sides of the house. He and a co-worker were setting up anchors for a pole jack scaffold when the victim stepped on a bracket to test its strength. The bracket came loose from the building, causing the victim to fall 25 feet from the roof of the building to the driveway. NJDOH FACE investigators concluded that, to prevent similar incident in the future, the following guidelines should be implemented:

- o Workers must be properly trained and equipped to erect scaffolds.
- o Use appropriate fall protection on all work at heights
- o Workers should examine the work site for hazards before starting a job.

INTRODUCTION

On September 20, 1995, NJDOH FACE personnel were informed of a work- related fatal fall from the county medical examiner that occurred the previous day. FACE investigators conducted a site visit on September 21, 1995, to interview the site owner and photograph the incident site. Additional information was obtained from the county Report of Investigation by the Medical Examiner (RIME). The victim's co-worker (witness) could not be contacted for an interview. OSHA determined that they had no jurisdiction in this investigation because the victim was the sole proprietor of his business.

The victim was a 43 year-old male handy man who was the sole proprietor of a odd-job construction company. He had emigrated from Cuba in 1981 and worked for an unspecified time for a construction contractor. He left the contractor to work on his own doing light construction. In 1986, he began renovation of the incident site, a private home owned by a friend. He sometimes lived in the house and was paid by the owner for the work done on the building.

INVESTIGATION

The incident occurred at a three-story wood frame house located in an urban area. The victim, who had been involved in renovating the house over the past eight years, was installing aluminum siding with the help of a second worker. The victim had been working on the project for two months, and had completed the lower half of the building. To complete the upper half, he was preparing to use a pole-jack scaffold. This scaffold required mounting upright wooden poles near the side of the building. The poles were to be secured to the building by a brackets nailed to

the roof and against the buildings side. Moveable metal jacks were to be positioned on the poles, and wooden planks placed across the jack's supports created the work platform.

On the day of the incident, a Monday, the victim and a co-worker were moving the scaffold from the front of the building to the rear. The two workers climbed a fire escape to the flat roof of the building and gathered their materials. At about 10:45 a.m., the victim completed securing the wooden brackets to the edge of the roof which would support the top of the poles for the scaffold. Wanting to test the brackets, the victim reportedly placed some boards across them and stepped on the boards. The brackets pulled loose from the building and the victim fell 25 feet to the asphalt driveway. The co-worker started screaming, alerting the neighbors who called for the police and EMS. The victim was transported to the local hospital, where he was pronounced dead three hours after the incident.

CAUSE OF DEATH

The county medical examiner determined that death was caused by blunt impact injuries of the skull and brain.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Recommendation #1: Workers must be properly trained and equipped to erect scaffolds.

Discussion: By stepping on the brackets to test them, the victim demonstrated his lack of training or understanding in erecting scaffolds. It is imperative that scaffold users be trained in the safe method of erecting, using, and breaking down the scaffolds. Sole proprietors and owners of small companies should obtain the written instructions for setting up the scaffold from the manufacturer before erecting the scaffold. If the scaffolds are rented, instructions should be obtained from the rental agency. Employers may contact OSHA for information on scaffold safety standards (see references).

Recommendation #2: Use appropriate fall protection on all work at heights .

Discussion: Workers should use appropriate safety equipment to prevent falls. The specific job site and its hazards determine which equipment is appropriate. In this case, a safety railing around the working perimeter of the roof may have been appropriate, and using fall protection while on the scaffold would be highly recommended. There are many different types of fall protection including catch platforms, personal lifeline systems, and safety nets. Employers should contact OSHA to discuss which system may be most appropriate for the particular job.

Recommendation #3: Workers should examine the work site for hazards before starting a job.

Discussion: To prevent future incidents, FACE recommends that workers carefully examine the worksite for any potential fall, electrical, chemical, or other hazards that they may encounter. These hazards can then be corrected or avoided before starting work.

REFERENCES

Scaffold Safety Regulations and Inspection Check List. Safway Steel Products, Milwaukee WI.

It is extremely important that contractors obtain good information on ensuring safe working conditions and following OSHA standards. Because it is difficult for a small business to get this information, the following sources may help:

U.S. Department of Labor, OSHA

On request, OSHA will provide information on safety standards and requirements for fall protection. OSHA has several offices in New Jersey which cover the following areas:

Hunterdon, Union, Middlesex, Warren and Somerset Counties	(908) 750-4737
Essex, Sussex, Hudson and Morris Counties	(201) 263-1003
Bergen and Passaic Counties	(201) 288-1700
Atlantic, Gloucester, Burlington, Mercer, Camden, Monmouth, Cape May, Ocean, Cumberland and Salem Counties	(609) 757-5181

NJDOL OSHA Consultative Services

This organization, located in the New Jersey Department of Labor, will provide free advice for business owners on methods of improving health and safety in the workplace and complying with OSHA standards. The telephone number is (609) 292-3922.

New Jersey State Safety Council

The NJ Safety Council provides a variety of courses on work-related safety. There is a charge for the seminars. The address is 6 Commerce Drive, Cranford, New Jersey 07016. Telephone (908) 272-7712.

Other Sources

Building trade organizations and labor unions are a good source of information on suppliers of safety equipment and training. Suppliers of building materials and safety equipment may be able to refer contractors to suppliers of fall protection equipment.