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State investigates scaffolding collapse

Saturday, June 18, 2005
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- The state is investigating Friday's scaffolding collapse that sent three workers at least 25 feet to the pavement.

An investigator for the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration responded to the scene at the Peninsular Club building, on Fountain Street near Ottawa Avenue NW, to determine if Dave Bouwkamp Masonry of Jenison followed safety regulations.

"They have to have scaffolding properly set up, safety (equipment) on the scaffolding, and (10-foot) guard rails," said Patty Meyer, a MIOSHA construction safety supervisor.

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She said it would be some time before the report is finished. The investigator is expected to interview the three workers, who were taken to Spectrum Butterworth Campus by ambulance. Their names were not released.

Company officials could not be reached for comment.

Grand Rapids Fire Department Battalion Chief Kevin Sehlmeier said it was a hard fall, with workers landing on the pavement and debris on the ground. The men were removing bricks from the building for installation of large windows, according to Wolverine Construction Co., which is supervising the project.

The workers told authorities they removed a larger brick than expected, which hit the scaffolding and took down the wood planks on which they were

standing, Sehlmeier said. They were working on the building's south side. Three workers on the ground were not hurt.

The injured workers, who were wearing hard hats, were talking with rescuers after the 8 a.m. fall, but likely suffered broken bones, firefighters said.

Sehlmeier did not know the extent of the men's injuries. He said two of them were immediately loaded into ambulances. The third walked limping to an ambulance.

The state last inspected Bouwkamp in 2000, and fined the company \$2,250 for five "serious" violations, which included scaffolding and hard-hat use, records showed.

The athletic club is undergoing renovations costing up to \$1.5 million.

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