



Contractors in Washington State Urged to Protect Workers from Falls -

06/29/2005

In light of a continuing boom in construction, as well as two recent incidents in which workers fell from rooftops, the Washington state Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) is urging contractors to take action to protect workers from deadly falls.

In the past 6 years, 38 construction workers in Washington have died in falls, according to the agency.

Construction workers, especially in roofing and framing, are exposed to falls from rooftops, skylights, scaffolding, upper-level floor openings and ladders.

In the two recent incidents, an Olympia, Wash., man fell 12 feet from the roof of an Onalaska school, and a Yakima, Wash., man fell 25 feet from the roof of a new grocery store in Longview. Both landed on concrete and were seriously injured.

The construction industry employs about 6 percent of the workers in Washington but accounts for approximately 19 percent of work-related deaths. One-third of these deaths are due to falls from elevation.

Falls in construction also are the leading cause of severe injury to employees, with residential construction having the highest severity rate of all injuries in the state. From 1998-2002, there were 4,600 serious and disabling injury claims filed as a result of falls in construction in Washington. These claims accounted for \$443 million in workers' compensation costs – an average of \$32,000 per claim. Many of the injured workers will never fully recover.

Earlier this month, L&I cited a Bellingham, Wash., roofing contractor \$92,400 for violations of the workplace safety rules that protect workers from falls and other workplace hazards. Mt. Baker Roofing Inc. was cited for seven violations. The violations occurred at two different worksites where investigators observed employees working on rooftops as high as 22 feet off the ground without fall protection, according to L&I.

"We're seeing a continuing pattern of these uncontrolled risks in the roofing industry," said Michael Wood, acting assistant director for the Washington Industrial Safety and Health Act (WISHA) program at L&I. "And we continue to see hundreds of serious injuries and a significant number of deaths each year attributed to falls in construction."

In April 2005, L&I sent out a hazard alert to roofing, framing, sheet metal and steel erection contractors to draw attention to the dangers of falling through unguarded skylight, roof and floor openings. The alert was prompted by the deaths of two construction workers who fell through holes while working on rooftops.

L&I is urging contractors to review and update their accident-prevention programs, provide appropriate safety equipment and training for the hazards, involve employees in safety and hazard recognition and set company expectations that emphasize safety.

"We all know that construction is a hazardous industry," said Wood. "But fall injuries, in particular, can almost always be prevented by taking a few relatively simple and straightforward steps."

- Josh Cable

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