

FATAL ALERT

On January 19th, 2009, a fire proofer was fatally injured when he fell from a second floor mechanical room doorway, 16 feet to the lower level of the empty stairwell shaft. At the time of the accident the employee and a co-worker were locating the “haunches” installed in this area of the concrete facility under construction for fireproofing during the next days shift. The haunches are angled steel supports affixed to the structure’s interior concrete walls and provide support to the concrete ceiling joists. The employee and his co-worker were walking atop the two story cell blocks and progressed into a second floor mechanical room. The work progressed around the perimeter of the mechanical room when the employee came upon a framed out door way that had no illumination in the area to be entered. The employee hesitated, asked his co-employee to borrow his lighter and without any light, he stepped through the unguarded doorway into an empty stairwell shaft falling approximately 16 foot. The employee sustained a severe closed head injury as a result of this fall and was transported via ambulance to a local medical facility. He was subsequently airlifted to a second medial facility where he later died from his injuries.

Significant Factors:

- Adequate guarding of the wall opening was not in place at the time of the accident.
- No means of illumination of the empty stairwell shaft was in place for the employees to conduct/complete their inspection.
- The employees conducting the inspection of the area were not familiar with their surroundings as they had been absent from the construction location for a period exceeding 60 days.
- The employees had not been adequately trained to recognize the hazards of falling and the procedures to be followed in order to minimize these hazards.

Recommendations:

- Brief all employees on the facts and circumstances of this fatal mishap.
- Evaluate safety program and incorporate specific training procedures emphasizing the importance of hazard recognition and avoidance specific to the workplace. These procedures should include, but not be limited to, conducting hazard evaluations before initiating work at a job site and implementing appropriate controls.
- Ensure that all employees are adequately trained to recognize the hazards of falling and the procedures to be followed in order to minimize these hazards.
- Provide adequate guard rail systems for fall of 6 foot or greater in construction
- Ensure that pre-work safety meetings are conducted each day to discuss the work to be performed, identify the potential safety hazards, and implement safe work procedures to control the hazards.