Barge Worker Drowns in Fall Into River

Two workers were assigned to unload a barge tied up at a riverside dock. One was operating a front end loader to transfer lime into a portable conveyor to carry it up to the dock. The other was tending the lines and checking the conveyor.

The loader operator saw his companion fall from the dock, hit the deck of the barge and roll off into the river. A ladder which had allowed access from the dock to the barge had also fallen in the river.

The survivor used the conveyor to reach the dock and call for help. Searchers found the broken aluminum extension ladder in the river. The body of the victim was found later. Cause of death was drowning due to a head injury.

It was not determined if the ladder broke before the worker fell or after. The victim was not wearing a personal flotation device (PFD), which could have saved him from drowning. Check ladders for damage before using them, and make sure they are securely in place. Always wear a PFD whenever you work or play around water. Safety (cargo) nets slung under ladders and gangways are a requirement in most jurisdictions to prevent exactly this type of incident.