Fall Through Roof Kills Ironworker



A journeyman ironworker fell through a roof and died of a brain injury.

He and a co-worker were working on the roof of a building being dismantled. They were in the process of removing large bundles of roofing panels, which were stacked along the edge of the roof. A crane was being operated from the ground to remove them.

The victim was acting as a signal person to the crane operator below. He had directed the operator to extend and lower the boom as far as possible to connect to the next bundle.

The end of the boom and the next bundle were not visible to the crane operator. The crane began to lift a bundle, which shifted and snagged one of the remaining bundles.

The victim signaled the crane operator to halt and then attempted to dislodge the load. In doing so, he stepped out onto an unsupported roof panel. The foreman heard it crack and shouted for the workers on the roof to stand clear. A co-worker who was trying to help the victim was able to step back onto the supported structure. The victim attempted to do so, but fell through the roof more than 40 feet. He died later in hospital.

Many things went wrong to contribute to this incident, most notably a lack of safety knowledge, training and equipment. The workers were not equipped with fall prevention equipment while working on the roof. Improper rigging was used to move the roof panels and the attempted maneuver with the materials was dangerous. No pre-job conference was held to plan the job, and no engineering advice was sought in planning the demolition project. The investigation also disclosed the victim had a blood alcohol content of more than .08 per cent which would have made him unsafe for driving. Intoxication on the job is extremely hazardous. In the case of persons working at heights, they endanger not only themselves and their co-workers, but the general public as well.