Inspector Dies in Fall From Bluff

A highway project supervisor who bypassed some basic safety rules died when he fell down a 40-foot (12 meter) bluff. While supervisors spend a lot of their time looking out for their workers, this case shows they need to remember the precautions apply to them too.

The victim was called to the site by construction workers digging along the top of the bluff. They were afraid their activities might dislodge boulders, endangering highway traffic, and they wanted the supervisor to inspect their work.

He arrived dressed in office clothes: a shirt, slacks and loafers. He climbed up to a large boulder near the bluff's edge then went down on his hands and knees to look over the edge, but lost his balance and fell to the road ditch below. He was pronounced dead at the scene from massive head and chest injuries.

The fatality sheds light on one of the basic rules of supervision: Supervisors lead best by example. They are on site not only to ensure the workers under them observe the rules, but to demonstrate safe work habits by their own behavior.

The government safety official who inspected the site and interviewed witnesses made some specific recommendations aimed at training and equipping workers engaged in hazardous activities:

- Workers exposed to fall hazards should use fall protection equipment. They should be fitted with a full-body harness, lanyard and lifeline. Proper standards for the lifelines, including the strength and type of cord used, should be observed.
- Employers should implement and enforce training in the recognition and avoidance of safety hazards. The training should include, but not be limited to, recognition of hazards and the selection and proper use of safety equipment.