Low-Height Falls Can Also Be Deadly

If you think fatal falls happen only to construction workers swinging off skyscrapers, consider the following incident: A maintenance worker died after a fall from an elevation of just eight feet (2.5 meters).

Look up right now. Chances are the ceiling in the room where you are working is higher than that. Probably even the light fixtures are above that level. Would you even think twice about going up a ladder – to adjust an air vent or remove dust from an overhead ledge?

The point is falls from low elevations can kill. Here's how this fatal fall occurred:

The 51-year-old maintenance tech was preparing to modify a chemical line in a room where food processing equipment was cleaned and sanitized.

To reach the line, he had to climb a fixed ladder to a catwalk. The 2.5-inch (6.3-centimeter) stainless steel line was located about 40 inches (one meter) above the catwalk level, and directly overhead for a person at the top of the ladder. As he reached the top, he hit his head hard on the pipe. He slid down the ladder, and from the base fell backwards, striking his head on the concrete floor. Efforts to save him failed, and he died about five hours later in a hospital. Both the top and the back of his head had been injured, first from striking the pipe and then from striking the floor.

How safe are you when you climb? Do you use properly constructed industrial stairs? Do you encounter overhead hazards? Be alert to danger at elevations – even low elevations. And what about head protection? In this case, a hardhat or bump cap might have prevented the first head injury from the overhead pipe.