Painter’s Helper Falls from Bridge Pier



A painter’s helper fell 140 feet (43 meters) to his death from the supporting pier of a large bridge. The victim was wearing a safety belt, but had not secured his lanyard to a safety

At the time of the incident, a four-person crew had installed the rigging for a basket. Two members of the crew remained on the road level of the highway bridge and planned to lower the lift to the top of the pier. The victim and his supervisor descended to the pier through the hatchway in the bridge and were supposed to secure the lift once it was lowered to them.

After they descended to the pier, the supervisor crossed the walkway to the southern end of the pier, followed by the victim. Both men wore safety belts with the lanyards wrapped around their waists. Contrary to safety procedures, the supervisor did not attach his lanyard to the static safety line but held onto the line with his hand as they crossed the pier. When he reached the other side, he attached his lanyard to a vertical safety rope that had been installed for use by workers in the lift.

There were no witnesses to the fall. The victim, who was new to this type of work, also did not attach his lanyard to the horizontal static line. As he crossed the pier, he fell to the wet mud below. He was pronounced dead at the scene by emergency medical personnel. The supervisor did not see him fall.

To prevent a fatality such as this, a worker must use fall arrest equipment correctly and use it at all times when working at heights.