Scaffolding & Access: Safe Erection, Use and Dismantling Fatality File



US Department of Labor finds contractors ignored safety requirement which led to worker's 65-foot fall from an elevated scaffold

What Happened

On December 7, 2021, a worker fell approximately 65 feet from an elevated climbing scaffold at a Denver construction site, suffering serious injuries while building a concrete elevator and stairway core. A federal OSHA investigation found that the contractor and its subcontractors ignored the scaffold manufacturer's explicit warning not to use the climbing scaffold while it was being hoisted atop a separate lifting device. The project's general contractor permitted workers to access and ride the climbing scaffold as a crane hoisted the system upward – a use never intended or approved for transporting workers. The scaffold became improperly elevated and the worker fell roughly 65 feet to the ground.

What Went Wrong

OSHA issued a willful citation to the subcontractor for allowing employees to use crane-hoisted equipment to reach the elevated work area, with proposed penalties of $101,519. The general contractor received a serious citation with proposed penalties of $14,502, and a separate steel erection company received a serious citation with proposed fines of $5,801 for unsafe crane operation. The manufacturer's safety warning was ignored, and no alternate safe method of elevating workers was used in its place.

The Bottom Line

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that 351 of the 1,008 construction workers who died on the job in 2020 were victims of falls from elevation. One decision – ignoring a manufacturer's warning about how scaffolding may be used – put a worker 65 feet in the air with no margin for error. Scaffolds must be erected, accessed, and used exactly as designed and approved.

Source: https://www.dol.gov/