Unfinished Catwalk Kills Worker



A mill worker fell to his death when an unfinished overhead walkway fell apart.

The catwalk was constructed at a sawmill so maintenance workers could reach machinery for oiling. The person building the catwalk was called away to another job before he had finished the construction. Not all of the brackets were in place to support the planking. The supervisor took it for granted the catwalk had been completed.

An equipment oiler placed planks on the brackets and saw an unsupported gap. He wrote a sign saying, "Do not stand here; no support." He tried to find a millwright to install a third bracket and fix it. When he couldn’t, the oiler went back to work and forgot about the hazard. Another worker was also concerned about the unsupported catwalk, but did not act on the concern.

Meanwhile, a timber got stuck in a sorting conveyor, jamming the machinery. Two workers tried to get it free. One co-worker left the scene to obtain a chainsaw.

The other worker stepped onto the unsecured catwalk plank between the conveyor system and the building external wall. The plank and the victim fell 21 feet to a lower concrete floor. During the fall, he struck his head on a steel beam and was fatally injured.

When it comes to safety, never assume anything. Don’t assume the other person has finished a job or corrected a hazard. Work should be inspected. There should be a procedure in place for reporting hazards so they can be corrected immediately. Always communicate your safety concerns, and follow up to make sure they are taken care of.