Window Washers Dead In Fall



Two men, aged 20 and 47, plunged 90 feet (30 meters) to their deaths while working as window washers. Both men had less than two years of work experience with the large facility service company, which only had a one-day training program. There was no supervisor on the site.

To do their work, the two men attached their ropes and board seats to a horizontal static line. They didn’t know it was part of an unsafe, abandoned scaffolding system. They made two passes up and down the building. To make their third pass, they had to move the static line and re-thread three U-bolts at the anchor point. These were re-threaded incorrectly.

Ninety feet from the ground, the rope gear released through the three U-bolts. The two fell to the brick courtyard below. Pedestrians and other workers called 911 for help. Emergency personnel arrived in minutes but the two men were pronounced dead.

The two workers should have received more extensive training. A qualified person should have made sure that all their anchor points and descent riggings adhered to safety codes. The anchor points for fall restraint gear should have been completely independent of descent control gear and personal fall arrest equipment. That way if any of the three mechanisms failed, the rest might continue to function.

Furthermore, the company had no business sending two inexperienced, untrained workers to the jobsite alone. A supervisor should have been present.

Source: Massachusetts Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program, Case Report 03MA01001