Worker Hit On Head While On Scaffold



INCIDENT

A 51-year-old man was suspended on a scaffold as he did facade repair work on a brick building in Manhattan when he was hit in the head by a heavy stone slab.

There was a cry for help from this man.

“I’m going to fall!” a man repeatedly said in Spanish as he clung to the scaffolding that dangled against a building on East 50th Street in Manhattan.

The man had been struck in the head and bloodied by a heavy piece of molding while repairing the building’s masonry. Although authorities rescued him from the scaffold, he would die later at a hospital at 51 years old.

Amid New York’s towering buildings, where scaffolding is so common it seemingly blends into the design, the man’s death offered a reminder of the risks faced by workers in a city under constant construction.

The man had been outside the 14-story residence at 311 East 50th Street when he was struck by a coping stone that had been removed to anchor the suspended scaffold, a Fire Department official said.

Witnesses saw the man clinging to the structure and heard his shouts.

“He was holding on for his life,” said Rodrigo Galindo, 52, who was delivering food nearby. “I was rooting for him.”

Firefighters climbed a ladder to reach the man, who by that point appeared to have lost consciousness, Mr. Galindo said. They broke a window and pulled the man inside, as a co-worker on the scaffold stood motionless, a witness said.

Jimmy Khan, 50, an employee at a nearby deli, watched as the man was carried away on a gurney. “I had to look away,” Mr. Khan said.

The man was taken to NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, where he died. His name was not released, pending family notification. **It was unclear if he had been wearing a hard hat or harness.**

A second worker on the scaffolding at the time of the incident was not injured

but was taken to the hospital for observation.

NEED TO KNOW

A cry for help came from seven stories high. Passers-by could only watch frozen and powerless. They were watching a person dinging to scaffolds that was dangling in the air.

BUSINESS / REGULATIONS

The owner of the building was granted a permit to repair the building's exterior facade, a $48,000 project that focused on mending window structures and repointing, a process of fixing weathered mortar, according to an application filed with the Department of Buildings. A sign outside the building identified the construction company as VLAD Restoration.

Last year, the company and its owner, Vlad Tomczak, settled a lawsuit with six demolition workers who said they were entitled to unpaid overtime wages and claimed more than $290,000 in damages, according to court records. They settled for $129,000.

A woman who said she works for the building's management company called the incident a horrible accident.

"We'll do an investigation as to the cause of the accident and make a determination of any liability and what they did right or did wrong," said Timothy E. Hogan, deputy commissioner of enforcement for the Department of Buildings.

Shortly after the incident, the Fire Department requested an inspection of the building, citing a "partial facade collapse," and noted that the site conditions were endangering workers.

Eleven years ago, the building was among those damaged by a crane that snapped from its anchors and smashed into an apartment, leaving a disaster zone of twisted metal and rubble. Seven people were killed, including six construction workers.

There were no apologies to the family of the deceased. No mention on Facebook or social media. This was a person under the radar who last words were uttered in Spanish who is part of the invisible and vulnerable.

The grim memories of that day were on the minds of residents on the block and likely will continue indefinitely.

"So many people died," said Susan Manuel, 70, who lives nearby. "It is very upsetting to people here. It makes me sad that workers are still vulnerable."

STATISTICS

The records show that it was unclear whether the dead worker was wearing a helmet. Had he had been wearing a hard hat (helmet) has chances for survival would have been much greater.

PREVENTION

Hard Hat Standards have been established by Canadian Standards Association (CSA) and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

Hard Hats must protect the wearer’s head against impact and against small flying or falling objects. It must be able to with stand an electrical contact equal to 20,000 volts phase-to-ground.

The wearer and the employer need to know the use and care of employee hard hats.

- Inspect the shell, suspension, and liner every day before you use it. Look for cracks, dents, cuts, or gouges. Replace damaged or worn hats and liners immediately.
- If a hard hat is struck by an object, do not keep using it.
- Don’t store your hard hat in direct sunlight—it will age quicker and can become brittle.
- Clean the shell, suspension, and liner regularly with mild soap and water.
- Never alter your hard hat by painting it, making holes in it, etc.
- Don’t carry things inside your hard hat.
- Don’t wear a baseball cap under your hard hat.
- Use a hard hat with a chinstrap when working at heights or in windy conditions.
- Check the service life of your hard hat by contacting the manufacturer or reading the manufacturer’s instructions.
- Putting retroreflective stickers or tape on a hard hat can help workers be seen by moving vehicles and equipment in conditions where visibility is reduced. However, the stickers or tape must be compatible with the surface material, not adversely affect the material, and not interfere with the ability to inspect the hard hat for defects. Place them at least 13 mm (1/2 in) above the edge of the brim.