

Roofer Falls 30 Feet from Rain Slick Roof

INCIDENT FACTS

REPORT #: 71-203-2021s

REPORT DATE: January 19, 2021

INCIDENT DATE: November 12, 2019

VICTIM: 45 years old

INDUSTRY: Roofing contractors

OCCUPATION: Roofer

SCENE: Roof deck of three-story
apartment building under construction

EVENT TYPE: Fall



A 45-year-old roofer died when he fell 30 feet from a rain slick roof of an apartment building under construction.

His employer was a subcontractor installing sheathing material and asphalt shingles to newly constructed three-three story apartment buildings.

He had worked for the company for nine years. Over the past eight months, he had worked with a crew to roof six identical buildings.

Shortly after 8 a.m. with a light rain falling, he climbed up a ladder and went on to the plywood deck of a 5/12 pitch roof of an apartment building. The five other crew members were already working on the roof.

When he saw that there was no anchor for him to clip on to, he descended the ladder, retrieved an anchor and returned to the roof to install it on the roof ridge.

While preparing to install his anchor, he fell and slid about 12 feet down the wet plywood roof deck. As he slid, he grabbed roofing underlayment in an attempt to stop his descent and then fell off the roof edge. As he fell, he struck a steel storage container and landed on the ground 30 feet below. His anchor and hammer were found near him.

First responders took him to a hospital where he died of blunt force injuries.

Investigators found:

1. The roofer was wearing a fall protection harness, but a lanyard was not attached to it.
2. The plywood decking had been exposed to rain for several weeks and due to it being uncovered the plywood fibers absorbed water and expanded, making the decking slick.
3. The roofer was wearing plastic rain pants, which could have accelerated his slide off the roof.
4. A crew leader-crew safety meeting had not been held that week.
5. A walk-around safety inspection had not been held that week.



Photo 1. Roof location from where the roofer fell. He accessed the roof's deck by a ladder from the building's third story. Roofing material is shown near the roof's ridge.



Photo 2. Incident scene showing the location where the roofer fell 30 feet from the roof.



Photo 3. Roofing underlayment he attempted to grab on to as he was falling.

Requirements

Regardless of the work activity, the employer must ensure that employees exposed to fall hazards of four feet or more while working on a roof with a pitch greater than four in twelve use one of the following:

- (a) Fall restraint system. Safety monitor systems and warning line systems are prohibited on steep pitched roofs;
- (b) A personal fall arrest system; or
- (c) A positioning device system.

See [WAC 296-880-20005\(6\)](#)

Requirements

- Employers must hold crew leader-crew safety meetings at the beginning of each job, and at least weekly thereafter. See [WAC 296-155-110\(5\)\(a\)](#)
- Employers must conduct walk-around safety inspections at the beginning of each job, and at least weekly thereafter. See [WAC 296-155-110\(9\)\(a\)](#)

Recommendations

- Before beginning a job, focus on identifying fall protection needs and ensure systems are in place to protect workers. This could include installing multiple anchorages positioned so that workers can safely move about the roof.
- Always use fall protection during roofing operations.

This bulletin was developed to alert employers and employees of a tragic loss of life of a worker in Washington State and is based on preliminary data ONLY and does not represent final determinations regarding the nature of the incident or conclusions regarding the cause of the fatality.

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