

Worker Hospitalized after Falling off Barn Roof

On a cold, wet winter day, a roofer with more than three years of experience was installing plywood sheeting on the lower roof of a pole barn under construction. He was working alone, however his employer was also onsite that day.

The roofer was aware of fall protection requirements, was wearing fall protection, and was tied off while working.

At some point, the roofer needed to briefly stop work to use the restroom, so he unhooked his fall protection from the D-ring on his harness and walked toward the access point at the edge of the roof. As he was walking towards the edge, he slipped on the damp roof surface. He slid off of the roof and fell nearly twelve feet to the frozen ground below.

He was taken by ambulance to a local hospital, but later flown to a trauma center due to the severity his injuries. He suffered from multiple back fractures requiring surgery.

The roofer was not released back to full duty for four months following the fall. He still endures pain from his injuries more than five years later.

What do you think went wrong?

In the space below, list some of the factors that you think could have contributed to this incident.

Then, flip the page over for contributing factors and safety recommendations and requirements.



Figure 1: The pole barn under construction.



Figure 2: Area on barn roof where worker slipped and fell after he unhooked his fall protection (red arrow).



Figure 3: The frozen ground where the worker landed after the fall.

Contributing Factors

The roofer unhooked his fall protection to walk the short distance on the slick roof. The employer did not ensure that their roofer was using a fall protection system all the way to the access point at the roof edge.

No fall protection work plan. The employer did not have a written, site-specific fall protection work plan. The roofer said that he was aware of potential fall hazards and protective systems, but there was no documented plan describing how and when to use fall protection.

Recommendations

Plan for safety. Conduct pre-shift safety meetings each day to discuss jobsite hazards and review the fall protection work plan.

- Discuss the safest route and fall protection procedures for walking to and from the roof access point.
- Check weather and roof surface conditions before starting work. Avoid slick, icy, or other hazardous conditions.

Safety spot checks. Employers or supervisors should perform daily fall protection spot checks to ensure workers are maintaining 100% tie-off.

Requirements

- **The employer must develop and implement a written fall protection work plan (FPWP)** including each area of the workplace where the employees are assigned and where fall hazards of ten feet or more exist.
 - The fall protection work plan must identify all fall hazards in the work area and describe the method of fall arrest or fall restraint to be provided.
 - Prior to permitting employees into areas where fall hazards of ten feet or more exist the employer must ensure employees are trained and instructed in the items described in the FPWP. See [WAC 296-880-10020](#).
- **The employer must provide fall protection training for employees exposed to fall hazards.** The training must enable each employee to recognize the hazards of falling and procedures to be followed in order to minimize those hazards. See [WAC 296-880-10015](#)
- **Fall protection required at four feet or more, on:** ([See WAC 296-880-20005](#))
 - **Steep pitched roofs:** Regardless of work activity, employers must ensure that employees working on a roof with a pitch greater than 4 in 12 use either a fall restraint system, fall arrest system, or positioning device system.
 - **Low pitched roofs:** The employer must ensure that employees engaged in work, other than roofing work or constructing a leading edge on low pitched roofs use one of the following: (a) a personal fall restraint system; (b) a personal fall arrest system; (c) a positioning device system; (d) a warning line system; (e) a standard guardrail system; or (f) safety watch system when work, other than construction work, is performed that is both infrequent and temporary, and not within six feet of the roof edge.
 - **Hazardous slopes:** While performing construction work on a hazardous slope, employees must use personal fall restraint systems or positioning device systems.
- **Fall protection required at six feet or more:** The employer must ensure that a fall arrest system, fall restraint system, or positioning device system is provided, installed, and implemented when employees are exposed to fall hazards of six feet or more to the ground or lower level while engaged in roofing work on a low pitched roof or constructing a leading edge. See [WAC 296-880-30005\(1\)](#)

Resources

- Chapter 296-880 WAC: Unified Safety Standards for Fall Protection — <https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=296-880>
- Fall Protection Basics for Construction — <https://lni.wa.gov/forms-publications/F414-154-000.pdf>
(Also available in [Spanish](#))