

Fatality Narrative

Carpenter Falls From Balcony*

Industry: Residential remodeling
Occupation: Carpenter
Task: Installing soffit in ceiling of apartment balcony
Type of Incident: Fall

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On November 1, 2005, a carpenter was killed when he fell from an apartment building balcony. The victim, a 40-year-old journeyman level carpenter, had been employed for one week with a company that does residential remodeling work. He and another employee were working from the fourth floor balcony of an apartment, installing the soffit in the balcony's ceiling. The victim reached overhead to tap the soffit boards into place, holding a small piece of scrap wood in one hand and a hammer in the other. The victim leaned his back on the balcony's temporary 2x4 standard railing in order to swing his hammer, and the railing gave way. He fell 26 feet 9 inches to the ground below and was taken to a hospital where he died of his injuries.

Requirements/Recommendations (! Indicates items required by law)

- ! Ensure that temporary standard railings are built securely enough to bear the weight of a worker leaning against them.
- ! Regulations require that the railing be able to withstand "a force of at least 200 pounds applied within 2 inches of the top edge, in any outward or downward direction." This may require the installation of some intermediate bracing.
- Temporary railings should be only constructed by competent people who are knowledgeable in the proper design and construction of temporary railings.
- Inspect temporary railings on a daily basis to ensure structural integrity and to make sure railings haven't been damaged during the construction process.
- ! Where guardrails may receive heavier stresses, the employer must increase the strength accordingly by use of heavier material or additional bracing.
- Guardrails may not provide adequate protection if a worker must be higher than floor level. When performing overhead work, evaluate the need for fall protection or possible use of alternative methods such as a scissor lift.

State Wide Statistics: This was the 67th out of 79 work-related fatalities in Washington State during 2005, and was the 7th out of 9 construction-related fatalities.

This bulletin was developed at the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries to alert employers and employees of a tragic loss of life of a worker in Washington State. We encourage you to consider the above information as you make safety decisions for or recommendations to your company or constituency. The information in this notice 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.

Developed by the Washington State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program and the Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) at the WA State Dept. of Labor & Industries. The FACE Program is supported by a grant from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). For more information, contact the Safety and Health Assessment and Research for Prevention (SHARP) Program, 1-888-667-4277, <http://www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Research/FACE>.

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Figure. The apartment balcony with a temporary guardrail re-constructed after the incident.

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