Aerial Lift Fatality Carries Important Lessons

Workers operating aerial lift trucks need to pay attention to unusual noises, uncharacteristic vibrations, or abnormal operation when controls are activated. That's one of the recommendations from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) following an investigation into a Nov. 8, 2006 fatality.

The 45-year-old part owner of an electrical contracting company died in a fall after the articulating boom of the aerial lift truck he was operating collapsed. The victim was working at a height of about 35 feet (around 10 meters) and changing light bulbs on a state highway in Ohio when the incident occurred.

NIOSH says a chain connecting the upper and lower boom sections broke and the upper section fell, striking the truck bed and ejecting the man from the bucket. He died from severe head trauma.

Sadly, the victim's son witnessed the incident and tried without success to resuscitate him.

Along with recommending that workers do not operate aerial lifts that are making unusual noises, vibrating or otherwise not operating properly, NIOSH recommended the following:

- Manufacturers' recommendations for maintenance and lubrication of aerial lift operating mechanisms must be followed.
- Qualified repair personnel must conduct regular maintenance and inspections of aerial lifts.
- Accurate boom maintenance and repair records must be kept.

A crew member told Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) inspectors that the victim had talked earlier in the day about the boom making "a funny noise." No records documenting an ongoing maintenance program for the articulating boom could be found. In this case, the manufacturer recommended that roller chains be lubricated every 30 days, noting that failure to do so

could result in chain failure.

Share this story with your workers and emphasize the importance of paying attention to unusual sounds or operational faults.