Counterweights Crush Worker

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An elevator operator died when the elevator’s counterweights came crashing down on his head and chest. The victim, a 49-year-old Hispanic man, had been working at the site for three months and was responsible for operating the site’s exterior construction elevator, moving workers and materials between floors. On the day of the fatality the victim noticed the lift was not returning to a level position on the ground floor. He asked a co-worker to bring him tools and entered the mechanism area where he began making repairs.

While the victim was making adjustments to the elevator, a group of workers arrived and asked to be transported to their floor. The victim asked a laborer to take the workers up and it was then as the elevator ascended that the counterweights descended and slammed down on the victim. The laborer discovered the victim almost immediately and called paramedics, but it was too late. The victim died as a result of major trauma to his head and chest.

Workers should not perform tasks they are not authorized or trained to do. In this case, two workers performed duties outside their job description: the laborer who used the elevator to transport the worker and the victim, who attempted repairs he was not qualified to do. An elevator technician qualified to make repairs would have known the importance of lockout procedures.

Source: California Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program, Case Report 05CA009