Lone worker takes fatal fall

A mine worker fell 500 feet (152 meters) to his death down a vertical passageway used to transport ore. His job was ore pass operator. He monitored the flow of ore down the pass and blasted it free when the shaft became obstructed.

No one saw it happen because he was working alone, but evidence indicated he stepped off the edge of a landing where rail cars dump ore into the vertical shaft.

The worker was not wearing the required fall arrest equipment at the time of the incident. Although a number of factors contributed to the fall, the equipment would probably have saved his life. Investigation showed he had been wearing new boots, which could have caused a slip, or the ends of the guardrail could have caused a trip. The ore pass door may have malfunctioned and in the poor lighting he may not have realized it was open. Investigation also disclosed this employee not only worked alone, but was unsupervised because he worked at a location away from supervisors and at different shift times.

If a supervisor had monitored this worker's activities and work areas, the story might have been different. Or if the worker had received solid training in the hazards of his job, he might have known how to protect himself from a fall. If you find yourself on your own at work, ask for help and guidance. Training and supervision should be provided. If they are not, keep looking until you find it. And always wear the recommended Personal Protective Equipment for your job.