Painter Dies in Fall From Tank to Concrete

A painter fell 25 feet (7.62 meters) from the top of a tank to the concrete pad below. He died of multiple traumatic injuries.

The company had a contract to paint the exterior of several outdoor tanks for a food processing company. The tank had a guardrail which nearly circled the domed top. A two-foot (.61 meter) gap in the guardrail permitted worker access to the top. However, the tank did not have a permanent vertical ladder for access. In order to reach the tank top, the painters climbed a permanent vertical ladder on an adjacent tank, then used small pipes, running between the two tanks, as a walkway to access the top of the tank to be painted. The distance between the two tanks was approximately six feet (three meters).

The victim was using a boatswain’s chair, a seat supported by slings attached to a suspended rope. While moving the ropes that secured the boatswain’s chair to the guardrail, he slipped and fell through the unguarded gap in the guardrail to the concrete at the base of the tank.

Planning for this job should have included methods for protecting the workers atop the tank. Safe access should have been provided, and the opening in the guardrail should have been blocked to protect the worker moving the boatswain’s chair. Also, the worker should have been protected by fall arrest equipment attached to an independent lifeline. Thus, if the boatswain’s chair or rigging had failed, or if the worker had slipped or lost his balance while on top of the tank, he would not have fallen to the concrete below.

Make sure all hazards are identified before you start a job, and that all the correct measures are taken for your protection.