Roofer’s Helper Falls Through Hole

A laborer took a fatal step onto a flimsy surface and fell 30 feet (nine meters) to a floor below.

He was a helper on a crew re-roofing an old warehouse. Workers were removing the roofing material, exposing the four-by-eight-foot (1.2-by-2.4-meter) sheets of plywood below. When they found damaged plywood, they tore it out and replaced it. The victim’s job was to pick up the damaged plywood and drop it down a chute for disposal.

They were working at night to avoid exposure to the vapors given off by the petroleum-based roofing products in the heat of the day.

The fatal fall occurred when a worker had removed a sheet of damaged plywood, and then found he had run out of the nails needed to attach the replacement wood. He walked away to get a new supply of nails but left the opening unguarded and did not tell his co-workers about the hazard. The opening was covered only by the silver-colored insulation inside on the ceiling of the warehouse.

The victim came along, picked up the sheet of damaged plywood and headed for the disposal chute. On the way, he stepped into the opening and through the insulation, falling to the floor below.

To prevent an incident such as this, site safety plans must be developed to address potential hazards that could lead to injury or death. Such a plan would have dealt with roof openings so they were not left unguarded or uncovered.

A site safety plan would also have pointed to the need for all workers on the roof to be equipped with fall protection such as safety harnesses and lanyards. In the case of the victim, a retractable lanyard would have allowed him to do his job and still be protected.

For night work, lighting must be adequate to allow workers to see hazards and do their jobs safely.

Communication is vital in injury prevention. All hazards on the site must be communicated to all workers on the site.