Suspension Trauma Fatality File

Case No. 2—One Death

A 27-year-old male cement finisher died when he fell from a suspension scaffold and his safety lanyard snapped. The victim and a coworker were dismantling suspended scaffolding at the 160-foot level inside a 172-foot-high, circular concrete silo. Both men were wearing safety belts with nylon rope lanyards secured to independent lifelines.

The accident occurred when the victim lost his balance and fell off an unguarded end of the scaffold. The coworker stated that he saw the victim fall and jerk upward as the lanyard caught him. When the victim’s weight dropped back on the lanyard, it snapped, allowing him to fall onto a concrete floor.

Examination of the lanyard after the event showed burn damage at several places, including the point of failure. The employer did not control inspection or distribution of this fall protection equipment. Instead, the equipment was kept in a common supply bin where the workers could readily obtain it when needed and return it when work was completed. The lanyard had been returned to the storage bin even though it had probably been damaged earlier during cutting and welding operations [NIOSH 1989b].