Unsecured Plywood Results in Death

An experienced worker was laying concrete on the second level of a construction project when the face shield from a welder’s mask fell from an upper level. The construction worker agreed to cross the wet concrete to retrieve the face shield for the welder.

In an attempt to avoid some of the wet concrete, he crossed over a maintenance shaft which had been covered by plastic and two sheets of plywood. As he stepped on the plywood, it up-ended and the worker fell 31 feet to his death.

Apparently, the weather was very cold and gusty winds were driving the snow through the building. The plastic tarp had been placed over the shaft in an attempt to keep the first floor heated while the concrete set. No barriers, signs or secure decking had been installed to guard the hole. Instead, the plywood was laid over the plastic to keep it from flapping in the wind.

Incidents are seldom the result of one single action, as this case shows. The wind blew the welder’s face shield onto the lower floor. It also created a problem with maintaining the heat on the first floor. The cold weather created a rushed atmosphere as workers hurried to pour and lay the concrete before it froze. The foreman was short-staffed and working under a tight deadline for the concrete pouring, so his usual safety check did not get done. However, the barriers and guardrails should have been installed on all floor openings before work commenced.

When the hazard was discovered ? presumably by the person who installed the plastic and plywood ? it should have been immediately reported to the foreman. Perhaps if the worker had taken a moment to think through the possible consequences of his/her actions, this tragedy could have been prevented.