What Went Wrong? – A Case Study

When you work in a large facility such as a hospital, you witness what seems to be a continuous round of construction and maintenance.

Buildings get put up, renovated and taken down again. Parking lots are paved, patched and built over. Systems for plumbing, heating, ventilation and electrical service are installed and altered.

All of this activity adds up to hazardous conditions for those working on construction and those doing their regular jobs.

Construction can be a dangerous occupation, with many workers dying each year in falls from heights.

Consider what happened to one worker when he went up on the roof of a large building:

A sheet metal mechanic died after he was knocked through a roof opening and fell to a concrete floor below.

He was working for a plumbing and heating contractor that had been in business for 22 years. The victim was working on a job to fabricate and install a sheet metal cap over an opening on the flat roof. The hole was made when an air conditioning unit was removed.

The cap, made of sheet metal, was positioned near the hole where it was going to be installed. The victim was applying caulk to a raised curb bordering the opening. A gust of wind knocked the cap over. It struck him and knocked him through the roof opening to the floor 22 feet (6.7 meters) below.

This fatality is a reminder about the importance of planning a job safely and using the correct personal protective equipment. The placement of the metal cap should have taken into account the possibility that it would be moved by the wind. The worker should have been protected by fall arrest equipment.

This case study also has an important reminder for anyone who

works in a facility where construction is taking place: Be aware of your surroundings, particularly overhead hazards and floor openings. Don’t enter a construction zone unless you are authorized to do so, and you are properly equipped with a hardhat and any other recommended safety gear. Falls, collisions with heavy equipment, electric shock and other injury incidents happen to people who just happen to be around construction work.