Worker Drowns After Fall

A railway maintenance worker was working on a train trestle. He was standing on a plywood platform and was involved in tightening a bolt on the trestle when his wrench became stuck.

He heaved on the wrench to dislodge it and his hands suddenly slipped off in such a way that he lost his balance. He fell over backwards through an opening in the trestle.

He hit a concrete abutment on his way down, then fell into the river. His co-workers immediately commenced a search and his body was finally found approximately one hour after his fall.

He was transported to the hospital where an autopsy revealed that although he had suffered several injuries including fractures of the skull, leg and ribs, the actual cause of death was drowning.

During the inquest that followed this incident, witnesses raised a number of points. In particular, it was noted that although some of the workers were wearing safety harnesses, very few of them were actually secured. Lines should have been strung out so those workers had something to attach their safety harnesses to. Naturally, if the victim had his harness secured he would not have fallen. At the same time, there was no buoyancy equipment provided and the platform where the victim was working had an opening through which he was able to fall.

Clearly there were several failures on the part of all personnel to comply with both legal and practical safety requirements. Ignoring these safety measures resulted in the death of a worker.