Ladder Safety for Municipalities – Fatality File



Laborer Injured in a Fall When a Portable Platform Ladder Overturned – Massachusetts

A 68-year-old male senior laborer (victim) was seriously injured in a fall while working from a platform ladder. The victim, employed by a municipality, and a co-worker were dusting crown molding in a meeting room inside city hall. The victim had finished dusting a section of molding and the ladder needed to be moved to continue the task. The co-worker started to move the ladder while the victim remained standing on the ladder's platform. When the co-worker was engaging the ladder's wheels, the ladder shifted and started to tip. The co-worker tried to stop the ladder from tipping, but could not, and both the ladder and the victim fell. The co-worker then placed a call for emergency medical services (EMS) and a call to his supervisor. EMS and local police arrived within minutes. The victim was transported to a local hospital and was eventually released, but he was paralyzed as a result of the incident. The victim died about six months after the incident from complications of the injuries he sustained during the incident.

Contributing factors identified in this investigation included: moving the ladder while a worker was standing on it; not using the ladder manufacturer-provided outriggers; lack of training on the ladder being used; and lack of a safety and health program.

The Massachusetts FACE Program concluded that to prevent similar occurrences in the future, municipalities should:

- Ensure ladders are never moved, shifted, or adjusted while an employee is on the ladder;
- Ensure that any manufacturer-provided safety features on equipment are used at all times;
- Evaluate non-routine tasks before assigning them to employees to ensure they have the proper equipment and training needed to complete the tasks safely;
- Develop, implement, and enforce a safety and health program that addresses hazard recognition and avoidance of unsafe conditions; and
- Provide work environments for employees that, at a minimum, meet all relevant Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations and industry-accepted standards of practice per the Department of Labor Standards policy.