

Improving Worker Safety in the Construction Industry



A 24 year-old Hispanic construction laborer was loading trusses on the ground with his brother-in-law when 27 mph high winds ripped an 8x4 plywood sheet from another laborer's hands off a commercial construction site roof 60 feet above. The co-worker on the roof jumped on the sliding plywood sheet but could not stop it from falling. The wind whipped the falling plywood out 30 feet and down six stories, striking the laborer in the back of the head just below his hard hat. The victim died later that day at the hospital from blunt force injuries to the head. The co-worker's life line prevented him from falling over the edge of the roof with the sliding plywood sheet.

The Challenge

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were 1.7 nonfatal nonresidential building construction injury cases per 100 full-time workers with days away from work, job transfer, or restriction in Kentucky in the year 2013; the fatal work injury rate in the construction industry was 16.5 fatal injuries per 100,000 full-time equivalent workers, 3.5 times higher than the overall worker fatality rate in Kentucky.

The Response

The Kentucky Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) program conducted a fatality investigation of the construction laborer death due to high winds and a falling sheet of plywood. A FACE report (#14KY008) was produced with five injury prevention recommendations related to 1) postponement of overhead work when high winds are present; 2) use of safety nets, toeboards, etc. to protect workers below from falling equipment and materials; 3) physical separation of workers on the ground from overhead hazards; 4) availability of worker safety training for Non-English or Limited English Proficient speakers; and 5) regular updating of worker safety training. The final FACE report was disseminated to the employer where the fatal work incident occurred, and to 2,416 other companies.

The Impact

Based on #14KY008 report recommendations, the employer has now implemented stricter subcontractor policies including requirements for safety nets to catch falling debris, use of toe boards on all roofing jobs, and barring of work on the ground while workers are laboring above. The employer invited the FACE investigator to speak to their workers (n=70) at the National Stand Down for Falls campaign in spring 2015. The employer then requested pamphlets, post cards and a fall protection knowledge test for future use in their Stand Down pre-work meetings.

For more information, visit the Kentucky Occupational Safety and Health Surveillance website: <http://www.mc.uky.edu/kiprc/projects/KOSHS/index.html>.