

TOOLBOX TALK #39

WELDER FALLS FROM TANK ROOF

A welder with more than 40 years of experience was construction the leading edge of an above-ground storage tank with sheets of metal sheathing. He was with 3 coworkers on a roof that was 76 feet wide by 34½ feet high with a 1/12 pitch. He was acting as a spotter for the crane operator who was hoisting the sheets to cover a 16-foot hole remaining on the roof.



After unloading the sheets, the welder needed to tack weld one near the center peak of the roof. He stepped from the leading edge to a rafter over part of the hole. He then says down on the rafter and extended his legs 2½ feet across the hole to another rafter. While sitting on the rafter, he used a pry bar to bend and move the sheet into place for welding. As he pried, he fell backwards through the hole between the rafter and leading edge and landed on the ground, 32 feet below.

Emergency responders arrived and airlifted the worker, who was still conscious, to the hospital. He died the next day.

Investigators found that the welder and his coworkers had tied off while riding a boom lift to the roof, but their supervisor allowed them to remove their personal fall arrest system harnesses when on the roof because the workers believed lifelines would create a tripping hazard. The employer lacked a fall protection work plan and did not know about state requirements to have one, and the project manager had not conducted any safety inspections at the jobsite.

To help prevent similar occurrences, employers should:

- Use a crane to move sheathing near roof leading edges
- Develop a fall protection work plan and personal fall arrest system policies in incident prevention programs. Policies should require preplanning the use, training and inspection of site-specific fall protection
- Have supervisors review fall protection requirements with workers at pre-job crew meetings, routinely check that they are following them and implement corrective actions when needed.
- Demonstrate fall protection leadership by prioritizing fall prevention at pre-job crew meetings, monthly safety meetings and annual stand-downs, as well as in company newsletters and on social media.