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Construction Safety: Coming Boom Provides Safety Challenge

- A 41-year-old ironworker sustained fatal head injuries after falling 18 feet from a structural steel framework to a concrete floor during the construction of an automobile repair shop.
- A 32-year-old roofer sustained fatal head injuries after falling 16 feet from a house roof to a concrete patio while making modifications to a newly constructed roof.

The victims were not using any fall protection equipment (for example, safety harness/lanyard systems), nor were they following task-specific safe work procedures as required by the Alaska Department of Labor, Labor Standards and Safety Section.

The Alaska Department of Labor recently predicted a construction "mini-boom" in the Anchorage area; 800 more construction jobs were reported this March compared to 1992.¹ Along with this good news is the potential for increased traumatic injuries associated with construction work. "The construction industry makes up about 50% of all fatalities investigated by OSHA, even though construction workers only make up 10% of the workforce."²

Common construction safety problems include inadequate Hazard Communications programs, inadequate safety training, inadequate head protection, lack of appropriate guardrails, improper ground-fault protection for electrical equipment, improper excavation protection, and improper electrical grounding.³

Keeping the jobsite safe results in reduced injury and increased productivity. Healthy workers reduce injury-associated costs, especially Workers' Compensation. Promoting safety on the construction site will save lives, prevent injury, and increase company profits. Workers, managers, unions, public health professionals, regulators, and safety specialists can continue to work together to promote a safe and healthful workplace.⁴

In the coming construction boom, managers, supervisors, and workers are advised to carefully follow standard practices for construction safety and injury prevention training.

Four Ps of Prevention:

- *prepare* to prevent (understand prevention and stay current on emerging information),
- *practice* prevention,
- *preach* prevention, and
- *persist* (That is, don't give up when initial safety efforts are not completely successful.)

A number of valuable safety training and injury prevention information resources are available from the Alaska Division of Public Health, the Alaska Department of Labor, and NIOSH, Alaska Activity. These include the [Epidemiology Bulletin](#), [Safetygrams](#), free consultations and training courses, NIOSH Alerts and Updates, as well as a number of technical publications and references. Alerts and Updates cover a wide range of occupational injury prevention topics including, falls from elevation, electrocutions, contact with machinery, lead poisoning, silicosis, confined space entry, and chemical exposures.

Requests for NIOSH publications and information can be obtained by calling 1-800-35-NIOSH or the NIOSH Division of Safety Research, Alaska Activity at 271-2382. Information on Department of Labor services (including [Safetygrams](#)) may be obtained by calling 269-4930 (Anchorage) or 465-4855 (Juneau). Additional occupational injury prevention information is available from the Section of Epidemiology at 561-4406.

References

1. Alaska Economic Trends, Alaska Department of Labor, June 1993.
2. Presentation from the Building and Construction Trades Legislative Conference. Richard A. Lemen, Ph.D., Deputy Director, NIOSH, April 19, 1993.
3. Federal Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) of 1970.
4. U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration - 1991.

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