Falling Through the Floor



Safety Talk

Falls through floor openings cause many deaths and serious injuries. These incidents also cause terrible feelings of guilt because typically, one worker fails to securely cover a floor opening and another worker falls through it to his death.

Although falls through floor openings typically occur on construction sites, they can happen in any kind of workplace. It isn’t always construction workers who are involved either. Sometimes the victim is just going about his business in an office, with no reason to expect a hole in the floor suddenly opened during a renovation project.

Consider these true incidents involving floor openings:

- An employee for a roofing contractor steps through an unguarded skylight and dies when he strikes the floor below.
- Two workers pick up a piece of plywood, one worker at each end, as they are cleaning up a construction site. As they move the wood, one worker falls through the hole it was covering, breaking both arms and suffering head, back and internal injuries.
- Fire breaks out in a food processing plant that’s no longer operating. Blinded by the smoke, a firefighter steps into an unguarded pit once used for loading. His back injury results in permanent disability.
- A motor vehicle servicing pit had been left open after the work was completed and the vehicle removed. An employee walking across the poorly lighted service bay stepped into the pit and was seriously injured.
- Electrical workers were making repairs in a crawl space below a storage room. Expecting to be gone just a short time, they left a floor panel open. An office worker walked into the storage room and fell into the hole, suffering fractures and bruises.

How can you protect yourself and others against falls through floor openings?

- Temporary hazards created by maintenance or construction must be physically barricaded or securely covered immediately.
- Use a solid covering for a floor opening. Many fatalities have occurred when someone stepped on foam board, roofing paper, cardboard or glass that was covering an opening.
- Secure the floor opening. A loose sheet of plywood placed over a floor opening has set the stage for many fatal falls.

- If a worker is guarding the hazard, he should have no other duties. He must not leave his post while the hazard remains.

Falls through openings are such unnecessary tragedies. Always secure, barricade and/or guard these deathtraps.