Worker Dies Shoveling Snow Off Roof



If you’re tasked with shoveling snow off a roof this winter, take a lesson from this fatality, in which an employee fell through a snow-covered skylight. Mark* had just finished working his regular shift when he volunteered to shovel snow off the company roof. But it wasn’t long before he was dying on the floor of the facility.

A Little About Mark
The 43-year-old laborer worked at a coatings manufacturing plant in Wisconsin for 18 years. Although Mark’s duties primarily involved mixing paint, he would frequently volunteer to complete other tasks for the company.

What Happened
Mark volunteered to clear snow from a flat section of roof. He was using large steps to walk through the snow when he fell through an unguarded skylight, resulting in death on the concrete floor 14 feet below.

The Investigation
It was learned that Mark had just finished his regular shift at the plant when his supervisor asked for help clearing snow and ice from a flat section of roof. Mark volunteered. While written safety plans were in place for routine job activities, there were no safety guidelines for clearing snow from a roof.

Mark and his supervisor climbed onto the roof and began walking around. Minutes later Mark stepped onto a threefoot-square skylight that was buried in the snow. The skylight only had a light plastic covering on it. Mark died of brain, neck and chest injuries.

Workers Take Heed
Employees should follow these recommendations to prevent similar deaths when working on roofs, especially during the winter season:

- Talk to your supervisor about developing alternatives to working on a roof to remove snow, such as equipment that can be operated from the ground.
- Identify and locate all skylights and other roof openings prior to starting work.
- Ensure there are adequate guards (screens or fixed railings) around or over these openings.
- Don’t perform additional duties until you are trained to see and avoid the hazards involved.
- Always ensure you wear appropriate fall protection when working at height.
- Advise your supervisor or manager of any hazards that need immediate attention.

*The names aren’t real, but the incidents are. These accounts are based on actual fatality investigations.