

Lessons from Loss

Distractions on the Jobsite

Scenario:

Dominic (Dom) and his cousin George had been employed by the big city Demo Company for a couple of years. Recently Dom had been estranged from his wife and had been experiencing various marital issues that caused him to become distracted on the job. Dom, 30 had also recently begun a relationship with an 18 year old girlfriend Kathy.

Dom operated one of the company's 10 wheel dump trucks on a full time basis while his cousin George worked as a laborer on the jobsite clearing debris for Demo Company. On this particular day Dom was waiting to get his truck loaded and left his truck to see his cousin George. Dom forgot to put on his hardhat which is required by all employees of Demo Company.

While unknowingly (?) walking through the Controlled Access Zone (CAZ) at the site, Dom received a call from his girlfriend and stopped under an archway near where others were actively working. Dom was apparently not paying attention as a 2' x 4' chunk of brick was pushed off the level above by his cousin George.

Dom was struck by the falling debris, striking his head and back rendering him unconscious and bleeding. It was later determined that being struck by the bricks had caused a spinal column injury that resulted in Dom being a quadriplegic (Quad) never to walk again. His cousin George has developed severe feelings of guilt associated with the injury of Dom.

A multi-million dollar workers compensation claim has been filed to provide Dom the care he needs to live out his life with this full disability. Dom is currently being cared for full time by his girlfriend and other family members. George has also filed a claim to cover the cost of his psychological problems he is experiencing as a result of his guilt feelings.

Lesson:

Demolition work can be very dangerous and often unpredictable - especially for multi-story work. Workers need to be alert and focused on the job tasks or risk creating additional hazardous situations for themselves, fellow workers and the general public as well.

Using personal electronic devices on jobsites can and does distract workers significantly resulting in accidents, injury and even death. Workers using tools or machinery, operating powered equipment or motor vehicles cannot afford to be distracted by personal electronic equipment such as cell phones, I-Pods, headphone equipped radios and the like.

Companies need to establish realistic written guidelines that clearly articulate company policy about these workplace distractions and articulate the reasons why and consequences during safety training. Workers should be afforded reasonable accommodation and times to allow use of cell phones during the workday.