

Failing to Learn from Fatality Endangers Other Workers



Safety professionals strive to prevent workplace injuries and fatalities from occurring. But when incidents *do* happen, it's vital that we learn from these tragedies and take steps to avoid making the same mistakes again.

After all, when a safety incident occurs, it usually reveals a previously unknown hazard, inadequately addressed hazard, flaw in a safe work procedure, improper machine guard or some other safety hazard. And once an employer is aware of or should be aware of a hazard, it must take reasonable steps to address it. That's the essence of due diligence.

An employer in Pennsylvania didn't learn from a workplace fatality and so endangered its workers. It's now facing \$67,000 in penalties.

According to [OSHA](#), a worker was fatally electrocuted on a roofing job when the [aluminum ladder he was using contacted a 7,200-volt power line](#).

Three days later, the employer sent another worker to finish the job 'using the same ladder' thus exposing him to the same hazardous conditions that led to his co-worker's death.

Kolek Woodshop Inc. was cited by OSHA for willfully exposing the second worker to preventable electrical hazards after the

fatality. (A willful violation is one committed with intentional, knowing or voluntary disregard for the law's requirement, or with plain indifference to employee safety and health.)

'The blatant disregard for worker safety demonstrated is horrifying and completely despicable. This company's failure to implement basic safeguards resulted in tragedy,' said Christopher Robinson, director of OSHA's Pittsburgh Area Office. 'Kolek's willingness to expose another person's life to the same dangers just 72 hours after the first fatality is alarming.'

Bottom line: For any good to come out of a safety incident, especially a fatality, employers must learn from these tragedies by identifying their causes and taking appropriate steps to prevent similar incidents from reoccurring. Simply returning to business as usual after a worker's death is unacceptable.