Spot The Safety Violation: Blow, Blow Thou Winter Wind

Any guesses on what caused the fencing around this construction site to collapse’

In addition to being prepared for the safety hazards that are always present in any given workplace, you may also need to take steps to address weather conditions that can impact worker safety. For example, windy conditions and high wind gusts can blow around tools and materials’and even cause equipment and structures to collapse.

For example, this picture from a hazard alert from Service NL shows how safety measures can be undermined by windy conditions. This fence, designed to keep people out of the site and away from its hazards and to protect passersby, became a hazard itself due to high winds.

Other examples of incidents in which wind played a role:

- High winds knocked over a tractor-trailer, which ended up on its side in a ditch. The wind was gusting to more than 100 km/h at the time. The driver and a passenger were taken to the hospital with non-life-threatening injuries.
- A crew was installing rafters on a building under construction. They were installing additional bracing to the rafters because wind conditions had worsened when the rafters collapsed, trapping a worker and seriously injuring his right leg.
- A family was walking down a street in Alberta when wind blew a bundle of steel off the roof of a construction project, striking them. The three-year-old daughter died; the husband and son were injured.
- A 22-year-old worker in New York was part of a crew installing metal decking on the roof of an automobile dealership. As he tried to secure sheets of decking, he was blown off the roof by a wind gust and fell 24 feet to his death.
- A student at Notre Dame filming a football practice from a scissor lift was killed after the lift was toppled by strong winds.

WIND SAFETY TIPS

Follow these safety tips if high winds or wind gusts could endanger workers or others:

- Pay attention to forecasts, especially wind speeds, and plan work activities accordingly.

- Don’t permit workers to work on scaffolding, elevated lifts, cranes, etc. in high winds. Also, ensure such equipment is secured properly so that it doesn’t blow over or collapse.
- Take steps to tie down or otherwise secure materials and tools to prevent them from blowing around or away. Particular attention should be paid to lighter materials such as sheets of insulation or vinyl and metal siding, which can easily become airborne.
- Inspect solid fencing (such as that shown in the picture), concrete formwork and false work, and vertical walls on incomplete buildings to ensure they can withstand high winds. Install additional supports if necessary.
- Inspect the worksite *after* the wind has died down to check the structural integrity of buildings, scaffolds, falsework and formwork, and ensure that any hazards created by the high winds are addressed before work resumes. For example, the collapsed fence in the picture should be repaired and re-erected before work resumes at the construction site.
- Ensure workers wear appropriate PPE in windy conditions, including eye protection and safety headgear.