

Spot The Safety Violation: Good Thing More Went Right than Wrong



Clearly something went wrong with the rigging two window washers were on but can you tell what went right'

The Spot the Violation usually focuses on safety mistakes or errors that have endangered workers' or could. But the picture in this installment is a perfect illustration of how good safety planning and training can protect workers even when something *does* go wrong.

This picture shows rigging being used by two window washers at 1 World Trade Center in New York City. They began work without incident. But as they were ascending at one point, the left side of the rigging stopped moving while the right kept rising. They tried the emergency stop, but it didn't work.

(Authorities are still trying to determine what caused this malfunction in the equipment.)

When the right side finally stopped, the rigging was nearly vertical. Both men could easily have fallen and certainly would've died if they had. But they didn't and were rescued about 90 minutes later by firemen, who cut through a nearby window pane and pulled them inside. Their only injuries: mild hypothermia.

Incidents involving window washers can often have tragic results. For example, a Montreal window washer died when the platform he was standing on collapsed and crashed into the roof of a restaurant 20 storeys below. So why did this incident have a happy ending? There are several reasons.

Emergency procedures. First, the company was prepared for emergencies and had appropriate [emergency procedures](#) in place. For example, according to the [New York Times](#), the window washers began their shift as they did every morning by going through a series of safety checks to ensure that they were ready in case anything went wrong.

PPE. Second, the workers were using [appropriate fall arrest protection](#). They were wearing safety harnesses that were secured to the rigging. This PPE saved their lives.

Materials and equipment. Third, the window washers also [secured all of their equipment and materials](#). That's why despite the steep tilt of the rigging, not a single item fell from it during the incident. And given that the rigging was at the 69th floor at the time, even a small item could've killed someone below if it had dropped from that height.

Training. Fourth, the workers had been properly trained. And [this training](#) not only helped ensure their safety but also helped them stay relatively calm when things went wrong and while they were awaiting rescue from their precarious

position.

Bottom line: The equipment malfunction could've spelled disaster. But because the window washers had been properly trained and given appropriate PPE and because they followed their training and used their fall protection as required, they survived unscathed.