

Spot The Safety Violation: Heavy Snow Can Collapse Roofs



What steps should've been taken to prevent this snow-covered roof from collapsing?



This winter, make sure you clear snow and ice off of the roofs of your workplace facilities. A lot of snow, particularly if it's heavy and wet, can compromise the roof's structural integrity and result in a collapse.

That's what happened to the Katowice Convention Center in Poland shown in this picture. In January 2006, the hanging load together with the load of the snow caused the center's roof to cave-in, killing 65 people and wounding many more.

Such tragedies have happened in Canada, too.

For example, in 2008, Québec's health and safety commission released a 100-page report on the collapse of the snow-covered roof of a food distribution warehouse. Three workers were killed. The report concluded that a decorative awning acted as a wall and let snow build up on the roof, exceeding its capacities.

Thus, it's important that you have workers regularly clear the snow from your roofs before it builds up and stresses the structure.

But keeping roofs clear is hazardous itself. Working from heights is always dangerous—and even more so when snow and ice make a roof slippery.

So ensure your workers follow these five tips when they clear your workplace's roofs:

1. Try to clear as much of the snow as possible from the ground.
2. Don't spray water on the roof to try to clear the snow—it'll just freeze and make a bad situation worse. Instead, use a de-icing chemical.
3. Never step on a sloped roof in wintertime, or even a flat, icy roof, without appropriate fall prevention equipment, such as covers, screens, railings or guardrails, in place.
4. If you must work on a roof, wear appropriate fall protection (such as a full-body harness, lanyard, connectors and appropriate anchorage points) and slip-resistant footwear.
5. Never sit on, lean against or step on a skylight lens or any covering placed over any opening in the roof.