Spot The Safety Violation: Snowy Roofs & Fall Protection

These workers are properly dressed for the weather but what safety equipment should they also be wearing’

In many industry sectors, falls from heights, such as roofs, are one of the most common safety hazards. And in the winter, when roofs are covered in snow and ice, falls are even more likely. So it’s especially critical at this time of the year that you ensure that workers to use appropriate fall protection when on snowy or icy roofs.

The workers in this picture are clearing snow from a roof in Boston. They’re all properly dressed for the winter weather, covering their faces and wearing hats and gloves. But what they’re *not* wearing is any fall protection. And given how close they are to the roof’s edge, they could easily slip on the snow and fall over the unguarded edge as they toss snow from their shovels.

9 Snow Removal Questions

A hazard alert from OSHA recommends that you plan ahead by answering these questions:

1. Can snow be removed without workers going onto the roof’
2. Are there any hazards on the roof that might be hidden by the snow and need to be marked so that workers can

see them (such as skylights, roof drains, vents, etc.)’

3. How should the snow be removed, based on the building’s layout, to prevent unbalanced loading’
4. What are the maximum load limits of the roof and how do they compare with the estimated total weight of snow, snow-removal equipment and workers on the roof’
5. What tools, equipment, protective devices, clothing and footwear will workers need’
6. What type of fall protection will be used to protect workers on roofs and other elevated surfaces’
7. What training will workers need to work safely’
8. How will mechanized snow removal equipment be safely elevated to the roof’
9. How will you protect people on the ground from snow and ice falling off the roof during removal operations’

And here are tips workers should follow when they *do* clear snow and ice from roofs:

- Clear as much of the snow as possible from the ground.
- Never spray water on the roof to try to clear the snow’it’ll just freeze and create additional problems. Instead, use a de-icing chemical.
- Never work on a roof in the winter’even a flat roof’unless fall prevention (such as covers, screens, railings or guardrails) is in place or you’re using adequate fall protection equipment (such as a full-body harness, lanyard, connectors and appropriate anchorage points) and slip-resistant footwear.
- Be wary of any skylights or other openings in the roof that may be hidden by the snow. (For example, a worker in Wisconsin was clearing snow from a flat roof when he stepped on an unguarded skylight buried in the snow and fell to the concrete floor 14 feet below. He died from his injuries.) And never sit on, lean against or step on a skylight lens or any covering placed over such a hole.