

Safety and health alert

11/2008 Apprentice cabinet maker killed by falling wooden sheets

Incident

An apprentice cabinet maker was killed when a stack of wooden sheets fell onto to him causing fatal crush injuries. The apprentice was standing in front of the stack of wooden sheets to assist two other employees in gaining access to a high moisture resistant, (HMR) board stored behind the sheets and closest to the wall. He and another employee were holding up the frontmost boards as a third employee tilted these boards toward them. The apprentice and employee standing in front of the wooden sheets were holding these up with their hands and tried to maintain the boards as vertically as possible so they were not taking the full weight of the sheets. While holding up several wooden sheets, the sheets tilted past the vertical and further toward the two employees. The weight of the falling wooden sheets became too great for the three employees and they attempted to move out of the way. The apprentice standing to one side of the panel stack was unable to move out of the way fast enough and suffered fatal crush injuries when the wooden sheets in the stack fell on him.

Factors to consider

- A majority of the wooden sheets individually weighed approximately 46kg and were approximately 3 metres long and 1.2 metres wide.
- The wooden sheets were stored vertically and stacked leaning against a workshop wall without racking or strapping.
- There were several different types of wooden sheets stored in the same stack, requiring employees to shift several wooden sheets by tilting them forward to gain access to the required sheets.
- There was not an appreciation of the force generated as a result of the weight of the panels combined with the velocity of fall that would result as the panels moved past the vertical.

Recommendations

1. Employers must ensure that the risk of being crushed, pinned or trapped by heavy material at the workplace is eliminated or significantly reduced by means of engineering controls and development of safe systems of work for the storage, movement and handling of such material.
2. Employers at the workplace must ensure that workers engaged in the storage, movement and handling of heavy materials are trained and proficient in carrying out these duties in a safe manner.
3. Employers should identify all manual handling hazards within the workplace, assess the risk of injury and develop and implement means of reducing the risk.
4. Employers should consider the capabilities of new and young employees to ensure special needs for these employees are assessed and provided for at the workplace.
5. Information and guidance provided in the Commission for Occupational Safety and Health Code of Practice *Manual Handling December 2000* can be used as a guide.

Further information

Further information can be obtained from WorkSafe's internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email safety@docep.wa.gov.au

Date: December 2008



Date:

