

Falls from ladders used in advertising sign maintenance

Initiative

In January 2005, the Minnesota Occupational Safety and Health Division (MNOSHA) investigated the death of an employee who fell while attempting to change the message on an elevated advertising sign while working from a portable extension ladder.

The purpose of this Minnesota OSHA Safety Hazard Alert is to heighten public awareness of the potential for death or serious physical injury due to falls from ladders or platforms while changing the message on the advertisement signs commonly found in front of service stations, other retail establishments and hotels.

Description of the hazard

In cold conditions, the extendable suction cup devices typically used to change the letters and numbers on advertising signs may not work effectively because of ice freezing the letters and numbers to the sign. Many employers use a portable extension ladder, which requires an employee to physically climb the ladder and rearrange the letters to form the current advertising message. When an employee is in this position, he or she is more susceptible to falling.

Controlling and eliminating the hazard

Employers and employees who perform these sign changing duties should consider the following safety suggestions.

- Exercise caution while working, especially in cold, icy conditions. Keep all equipment properly maintained and in good working order.
- Make sure the ladder has a secure footing and both legs are supported on the top as well. A second person should be used to help secure the ladder.
- Digital marquee signs are also available that allow the marquee to be changed with equipment located in the store.
- Additional alternatives, such as using a bucket truck or personnel lift, can be considered, but individuals must be properly trained about their use and be provided with and use the appropriate safety equipment.
- When letters are stuck to the sign due to icy conditions, consider using an ice scraper with an extendable handle if the height of the sign makes this feasible.
- Avoid changing the sign until the weather conditions improve.
- Ensure employees are properly trained and understand the safe work practices associated with the use of ladders and platforms while changing advertising signs. Your efforts will help prevent serious injuries and fatalities by controlling or eliminating the variety of hazards associated with displaying your message to the public.

For more information

Employers and employees with questions or concerns can refer to the federal OSHA website at www.osha.gov or call MNOSHA Compliance at (651) 284-5050 or toll-free at 1-877-470-6742. The OSHA standards 1910.25 and 1910.26 cover requirements for ladders; the construction standards 1926.1053 and 1926.1060 have further information that can help prevent serious injuries. (**Note:** Retail establishments are not required to follow the construction standards; however, the information provided can be helpful with the safe use of ladders.)

Acknowledgements

The principal contributors to this Minnesota OSHA Safety Hazard Alert were Brenda Nickles and Kyle Van Lent, safety investigators with the Minnesota OSHA Mankato Area Office.