

A 34 year old male employee fell 20' to a concrete floor while working to fumigate tobacco barrels.

Employees were engaged in a 2.5-day job of fumigating tobacco at a warehouse. On the second day of the job, the employees arrived to begin wrapping stacked barrels of tobacco with plastic for fumigation. The tobacco barrels, referred to as hogsheads, were four feet tall and four feet high, with a circumference of 4 feet. Each barrel carried approximately 1,000 pounds of tobacco. The tobacco barrels were stacked in tiers, four and five units high, creating a walking-working surface. The stacked barrels formed rows approximately 25 units long and 8 units wide, resulting in a surface area of approximately 91 feet by 36 feet. There was a gap between some of the rows of barrels measuring approximately 36 feet long and 61 inches wide. The employee fell through the plastic sheeting.

Personal fall arrest systems were used with retractable yo-yo devices that were connected to 6 and 12-foot long cross-arm straps secured to ceiling beams. While on top of the barrels, the employees unraveled a plastic sheeting (2 mm thickness, 40 inches wide by 450 feet long) by walking with it and passing it off to another employee. When they encountered a gap between the barrels, they tossed the plastic over the gap to cover it. Once the plastic reached the end of the stack, it was dropped to the floor below, where it would be cut, taped, and glued to seal it.

Based on employee interviews, it was revealed that the victim unfastened his PFAS as he attempted to relocate to another cross-arm strap. While his PFAS was disconnected, he attempted to move from a five-tiered stack he was sitting on, which stood at a height of 20 feet, to a four-tiered stack positioned beneath him, which was 16 feet high. While transitioning between cross-arm straps, which were spaced too far apart to maintain connectivity, he fell through the plastic sheeting. Consequently, he fell the full 20 feet, impacting the concrete surface below and sustaining fatal blunt force trauma to the head.

Citation(s) as Originally Issued

A complete inspection was conducted at the accident scene. Some of the items cited may not directly relate to the fatality.

Citation 1 Item 1

Type of Violation: Serious

\$5400

29 CFR 1910.28(b)(1)(i): The employer did not ensure that each employee on a walking-working surface with an unprotected side or edge that is 4 feet (1.2 m) or more above a lower level was protected from falling:

In that employees were exposed to fall hazards while rolling plastic sheeting over stacks of 16 and 20-foot-high tobacco barrels when they unhooked their lanyards from the cross-arm straps

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and before they re-hooked to the next cross-arm strap, resulting in an employee falling 20 feet to his death.



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