

Up in a Flash, Down in a Crash

Raegen Post

All jobs have minimal safety standards. These standards can range from following extensive safety protocols to common sense practices. Every job has its ups and downs. My story involves a ladder that was set up in a flash.

During the summer I was working as a part-time custodial assistant, in a local high school. This job consisted of cleaning the walls, shelving units, light fixtures, inside and outside of lockers and desks. Each morning I would meet with my supervisor to review the day's tasks. After this brief meeting I would independently begin the tasks assigned to me. By mid July I had completed a thorough cleaning of all the lockers and desks. My next job was to clean and sanitize all wall surfaces. The day when I was to start cleaning walls, I had come to find that the walls were too tall to reach from the ground; therefore a ladder would be required to reach them. I had used ladders before to clean gutters, paint, wash windows and more. I was confident in my ability to set-up and properly use a ladder. After I had quickly set up the ladder I left to go collect the proper cleaning supplies for the task. When I returned I immediately began to climb up the rungs of the ladder. Once I had reached the third rung I felt the ladder begin to shake beneath my feet and realized I had been overly confident in my setup of the ladder. Quickly I climbed down the unstable ladder. Once I was safely on the ground, I then came to the realization that if I was near the top of the ladder I could have fallen from a significant height. A fall like that could have left me seriously injured. I gathered myself together and then I proceeded to set the ladder up paying closer attention to ensure it was set up safely and was sturdy. I then cautiously brought all the supplies up the ladder and finally proceeded to do my task of cleaning the wall.

There were various impacts that my incident had on me personally. The majority of the impacts were emotional, although if I had actually fallen off the ladder there would have been both physical and financial impacts as well. Once I had gotten off the unsafe ladder I immediately felt scared and overwhelmed. Not only about what had just happened but also what could have happened, if I was higher up the ladder. After I had, had a minute to calm down I was able to clearly and rationally assess the situation. This assessment made me realize I had been

careless in setting up the ladder and not paid enough attention to safety. This close call made me recognize I had to focus on my safety and not just completing the task. Attitudes toward working can sometimes focus on finishing the task in a fast efficient way. Although quickness and efficiency are good things to remember, the biggest thing to keep in mind when on a job site is workplace safety. No job is worth risking your own personal safety for.

My incident was avoided by merely climbing down the ladder. When considering if I had actually fallen off the ladder I realize how I could have easily broken bones, or even suffered from a concussion. This would have had many impacts on my life. This incident could have ruined my future plans for the year to play basketball; with a broken leg this goal is very unachievable. Driving is a large part of my life not only to get to work but also to hang out with friends. With broken bones or even a concussion you are usually not allowed to drive, which would have created many difficulties for my daily life. Financially this would have been difficult as well because of various therapists and specialists that I could have possibly needed. If I would have broken bones or even had a concussion this would hinder me from continuing my job which would have affected me financially. The various impacts this incident had or even could have had are frightening to even imagine.

In late 2015 a Safety in Schools presentation came to our school, the presentation was called, "See Something. Say Something." The majority of the presentation consisted of the speaker Candace Carnahan explaining her workplace accident where she lost her leg. She shared her personal story and included the various emotional, physical and financial impacts her accident had caused her. Her presentation explained how there is legislation that protects workers from doing unsafe work and that you may refuse to do an activity at your work if you feel it is unsafe or could put you in danger. Also along with being able to refuse Candace shared the importance of speaking up about workplace hazards. Toward the end of the presentation Candace shared how her accident had affected all the people around her including her family, friends, coworkers and community. Candace's presentation explained how both your body and mind must be present when doing your job. This was especially true for my situation where if I had been present both mentally and physically I could have been much safer. This presentation was very informational about my situation and sharing the proper way to handle various safety issues.

Ladder safety is important for many workplaces. Therefore Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Code have various codes about ladder safety. Specifically in Part 8 *Entrances, walkways, Stairways and Ladders*: section 136 *Securing and positioning* has an entire code dedicated to safe ladder procedure. Section 136 part (a) states; “A worker must ensure that a portable ladder is secured against movement and placed on a base that is stable.” This code states what I forgot to do. When reading the explanation guide that coincides with the OHS code, it furthermore explains that ideally a worker should secure both ends of a ladder if possible. In my incident this would have been helpful to reminder. There are many codes that can help Albertans to be safe in their workplace environments. It is important and helpful to know that the government and other organizations are concerned with individuals who are injured while at work.

To eliminate the hazard I could have simply set up the ladder safely. Although I did not do this properly the first time it is a lesson that I will never forget. From now on I have continuously double checked the safety of any ladder or other equipment I use. This incident could have been easily avoided; by simply focusing on the task and being more cautious when setting up the ladder. This entire incident served as a lesson in both safety and focus. While at work you expect to be safe in all things you do. Workers need to play an active role in their personal safety as well as workplace safety. There are so many workplace related incidents that can seriously injure people every day. I think it is important to outline these hazards and educate all people about these issues. My incident serves to remind me that safety must always be the most important factor while working.

Bibliography:

OHS Code. (2009, July 1). Retrieved May 28, 2016, from <http://work.alberta.ca/SearchAARC/1334.html>