

Shepherd's Hooks Banned

The Ontario Ministry of Labour is investigating the effectiveness of a fall arrest safety device known as a "shepherd's hook" following a recent fatality at a construction site in Cumberland, Ont.

An investigation into the May 30, 2008 death involving an electrical utility worker identified the hook as a possible hazard. The worker fell about 30 metres (98 feet) from an un-energized, partially-built electrical transmission tower.

"We're looking into the use of shepherd's hooks in fall restraint systems to determine whether they may pose a hazard," says Michael Chappell, provincial coordinator of the ministry's Construction Health and Safety Program.

"It's believed the hook could become inadvertently disengaged through a number of unintentional worker actions, increasing the worker's risk of falling."

Chappell described a shepherd's hook as a long staff with a hooked end that is placed over a horizontal member on a structure such as a steel angle brace in order to temporarily anchor a worker while he is ascending or descending.

"Under some circumstances, it's possible the hook could slip off the girder through a bottom opening where the hook curves around to meet the staff," Chappell said

"The hook could then fall, resulting in an unexpected jerk to the worker's fall protection harness. This could endanger the worker, who would be attached to the hook by a lanyard, because he would no longer be anchored to the building structure and protected against a fall."

The ministry issued a stop use order to the employer of the deceased worker under Section 54 of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.

"We will be issuing similar orders to any employer found using a shepherd's hook in a fall arrest system," Chappell warned. "In the meantime, we are working with the employer of the deceased worker on an alternative means of fall restraint."

The ministry is continuing to investigate the worker fatality. The cause has not yet been determined.

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