Investigation Process

What triggers an investigation by the N.C. Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Division?

- A worker’s death.
- Hospitalization of an employee, an amputation or the loss of an eye.
- The department may also receive information of a fatality or catastrophe from media reports or referrals from other government agencies.

How is the NCDOL OSH Division notified?

- An employer must notify NCDOL within eight hours of any work-related fatality. In-patient hospitalizations of one or more employees, any work-related amputation, and any work-related loss of an eye must be reported within 24 hours.

What will the investigation focus on?

- The investigation will usually be limited to the events surrounding the accident unless observations at the site indicate a broader investigation is needed.

What will happen during the investigation?

- An OSH investigator will go to the accident site and collect physical evidence, including photographs.
- The investigator will interview employees, witnesses and management officials about the accident to determine its cause.
- Any violations of safety and health standards will be noted and citations will be issued.

How long will the investigation take?

- An investigation can take anywhere from a few weeks to six months, depending on the complexity of the accident.

When are investigation results disclosed?

- Citations and penalties, if issued, can be released to the public on the issuance date.
- Other contents of the file cannot be released until the case is closed or final order on citations is rendered.

The Investigation

OSH investigators will seek to determine several factors, including whether:

- Ladders were maintained in good condition.
- Ladders were inspected frequently, and those with defects were not used.
- Employees were trained in the hazards associated with ladder use.
- Nonconductive ladders were used near electrical equipment.
- Worker faced the ladder when ascending and descending.
- Ladders were placed at a proper angle of one-fourth the working length of the ladder from the vertical wall.
- The top step was not used on a stepladder.
- Ladders were used only for the purpose intended.
- A safety program, including ladder safety, was developed.

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Cherie Berry, Commissioner

29 CFR 1926.1053, Ladders

Industry Type: General Industry and Construction
Accident Type: Fall from ladder

Statistical Data: Falls from elevations were the cause of death in 10 out of the 40 fatalities NCDOL investigated Oct. 1, 2013, through Sept. 30, 2014.

What programs does the Department of Labor have in place to prevent falls from ladders?

Construction special emphasis program: Increased training and attention in a dangerous industry.

Free training: Workshops, training and consultation in both English and Spanish.

Publications: Industry guides that pinpoint fall hazards in general industry and construction.