

**North Carolina Department of Labor
Occupational Safety and Health Division**

Raleigh, North Carolina

Field Information System

Operational Procedure Notice 122E

Subject: Special Emphasis Program for Communication Towers.

A. **Purpose.**

This Operational Procedure Notice (OPN) establishes a Special Emphasis Program (SEP) to provide enforcement guidance and address the hazards associated with communication tower work during construction, alteration, repair, operation, inspection and maintenance activities.

B. **Scope.**

This OPN applies to all programmed and unprogrammed North Carolina Department of Labor, (NCDOL) Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Division activity associated with the construction, alteration, repair, operation, inspection and maintenance of communication towers.

C. **Action.**

This OPN provides for special emphasis inspections in accordance with NCGS 95-136.1(b)(3) due to a high risk for serious or fatal work related injuries or illnesses. This OPN will be used in conjunction with CPL 02-01-056 – *Inspection Procedures for Accessing Communication Towers by Hoist.*

D. **Discussion.**

As a result of growth in the cellular phone industry and the need for more communication tower construction, an increasing number of employers entered the industry with little or no training in the unique safety aspects involved in climbing a tower. This resulted in an increase in the number of accidents in the industry, which due to the nature of the work, were often fatal.

A study by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) indicated that there were 118 communication tower worker deaths in the United States from 1992-1998 (93 falls. The report also indicated that the actual number was likely higher but fatality reporting did not always specify that the employee was working on a communication tower (e.g. other fatalities could have been listed as: painter, steel erector, electrician, etc.).

From May 1997 to February 2005, a review of N.C. workplace fatalities revealed that 10 were related to communication tower work. The OSH Division recognized that there were existing consensus standards that addressed hazards related to the communication tower industry; however, the OSH Division felt that existing consensus standards were inadequate and not readily available to employers/employees engaged in communication tower work activities.

In 2000, the NCDOL began working with representatives from the communication tower industry to create rules to protect workers during the construction, erection, installation,

operation, maintenance, and disassembly of communication towers. As a result of this collaborative effort, North Carolina created the nation's first comprehensive occupational safety and health communication tower rules. These rules were fully enacted by the end of the 2006 N.C. legislative session.

Statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor indicated that in 2013 more fatalities occurred in this industry than in the previous two years. This trend has continued in 2014 with nine worker deaths, nationwide, as of July 24th.

E. **Inspection Procedures and Guidelines.**

1. During activities associated with the construction, alteration, repair, operation, inspection and maintenance of communication towers, the OSH Division enforces 13 NCAC 07F.0600 - Communication Tower Standards. As of July 28, 2006, all sections of the rule were in effect. The sections are as follows:

- 13 NCAC 07F.0601 – *Scope and Application.*
- 13 NCAC 07F.0602 – *Definitions.*
- 13 NCAC 07F.0603 – *Employer Responsibilities.*
- 13 NCAC 07F.0604 – *Hazard Identification and Assessment.*
- 13 NCAC 07F.0605 – *Fall Protection.*
- 13 NCAC 07F.0606 – *Non-ionizing Radiation.*
- 13 NCAC 07F.0607 – *Hoists and Gin Poles.*
- 13 NCAC 07F.0608 – *Recordkeeping.*
- 13 NCAC 07F.0609 – *Training.*

F. **Compliance Assignments.**

1. The OSH Division will develop a list of establishments (work sites) likely to be covered by this special emphasis program. Site locations will be distributed to each district office where communication tower activity is known.
2. In recognition of the mobile and time sensitive nature of communication tower work, serious hazards observed will normally be investigated immediately by the compliance officer (CSHO) who observes the activity, after consulting with the district supervisor. Serious safety hazards observed by individuals other than a CSHO will be referred to the applicable district supervisor. Because many tower operations are located in remote locations where the observation of hazards from a public way is not possible, when a CSHO observes or receives information regarding a site where communication tower work is taking place but no violation is observed, the CSHO and the district supervisor will determine if the site should be immediately inspected or added to the list of establishments to be selected for future inspection activity. Such determination will be based on, but not limited to, the following criteria: the resources available for inspecting the site, the size of the operation, the prior history of the operator if known, and/or the stage of construction/maintenance activity. Each district office will conduct inspections in support of this SEP.

G. **OSHA Express Coding.**

For all inspections conducted as a result of this SEP, the CSHO will select "COMTOWER" on the drop down menu on the OSHA 1, under the Emphasis/Initiatives tab.

H. **Effective Date.**

OPN 122D is canceled. This OPN is effective on the date of signature. It will remain in effect until revised or canceled by the director.

Signed on Original
Edward E. Lewis
Safety Standards Officer

Signed on Original
Allen McNeely
Director

11/06/2014
Date of Signature