

## **FALLS THROUGH DECK HOLES**

### **The Story**

Here are summaries of a few preventable offshore fatalities involving falls:

1. A floorman on a drilling platform was lacing a tarpaulin wind dodger over the peripheral handrail on the derrickman's platform, 66 feet above the drill floor. He was an experienced worker and had worked on the derrick on previous occasions. He was wearing a safety harness but left the safety line of the harness unattached while working on the catwalk. There were no witnesses to his actions on the catwalk; suddenly, however, hearing a lot of noise, another worker turned in time to see the floorman falling feetfirst through the manhole where the ladder came up to the derrick floor. He rolled in midair, landed on his head on the rig floor, and died a short time later.
2. A casing crew began preparations to run casing pipe. One member of the crew on the derrickman's platform was in the process of setting up tong lines. Another member of the crew, who noticed he was having some difficulty, went up to offer his help. Neither worker was wearing a safety harness. While walking toward the first employee to take a tong line, the second employee stepped through the 3- by 3-foot ladder opening and fell to his death on the platform below. The opening was not protected by any trap door, safety chain, rail, or guard.
3. A roustabout working on top of a diesel tank aboard a platform disappeared while running a two inch fuel line from the tank to an engine. A coworker saw his hard hat fall into the water and surmised he had fallen overboard. A search of the water near the platform proved fruitless. Then a crew member noticed that a piece of 1/4-inch-thick asbestos that had covered a 28-inch-wide open hatch on the top of the diesel tank was missing. Visual inspection of the tank turned up a glove and a metal cigarette case, and a probe found the roustabout's body at the bottom of the tank. The reason for removing the metal tank hatch cover and putting the asbestos in its place was never established.
4. While checking the drive pipe level, an industrial worker on a drill barge in the Gulf of Mexico was standing on wooden scaffold boards that covered the area around the perimeter of the dummy rotary table. As the worker moved along the scaffold, a board either broke or dislodged, and the worker fell through. A safety net had been rigged below, but the worker fell through the net into the water. He was dead when recovered ten minutes later.
5. A roustabout was assigned to install U-bolt pipe hangers on a line underneath the northern side of a platform under construction in the Gulf of Mexico. While he was working from a

scaffold which provided access to the piping, three other workers from the same company were replacing a piece of grating on a nearby crosswalk. The section of grating to be replaced was located about four feet south of a tubular support which obstructed the view of the crosswalk beyond. A section of grating 28 inches by 41 inches was removed from the crosswalk. One worker went to the platform crane to prepare for hoisting. The two other workers went to the standby boat to ready the replacement grate. No line or guard was placed near the gap in the walkway when the three workers left. One of the workers who had gone below then noticed something fall from the cellar deck into the water near the center area of the platform. Blood was observed in the water, and a few moments later the body of the roustabout assigned to install the U-bolt pipe hangers was recovered. He had apparently walked from the north end of the cellar deck along the north-south crosswalk. The tubular support member obstructed his view of the crosswalk beyond the member, and he apparently did not see the opening after he stepped around the obstruction.

6. Welders on a new platform that was still being outfitted had cut a hole in the deck to allow passage below to where they were working. The opening had been properly roped off overnight. Upon resuming their work in the morning, the welders had removed the barrier and climbed down onto scaffolding below the deck. The owner of a safety products firm walked across the deck with a cup of coffee in his hand while making an inspection tour of the platform. He fell through the unguarded opening, striking a three-inch angle iron scaffold support and falling to his death in the Gulf of Mexico.

## *Lesson Learned*

*The lessons to be learned are self-evident, human carelessness and failure to take simple precautions are frequently significant contributing factors to injuries and deaths.*

*Prevention Through People*



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