

TST #105-B

Scaffold Safety

An owner of a scaffolding company in New York erected a 130-foot scaffold in downtown New York that was not approved by a licensed engineer. Because of the shortcuts taken by that company, five employees were killed as a result of falls and being crushed by falling material and scaffolding. Four other workers suffered multiple serious injuries. The owner was sentenced to 3-1/2 to 10-1/2 years in prison for “reckless death” and “reckless assault.”

The scaffolding in this case was erected in nine days and was 13 stories tall. The scaffolding was extremely overloaded and not adequate for supporting 16 employees, jack hammers, bricks and other related material. The excessive weight was ruled as the determining factor for the failure.

To ensure the highest possible level of scaffold safety, operators should follow these guidelines:

1. Scaffolding must be designed by a qualified person who has received scaffold building training and constructed according to manufacturer recommendations.
2. Each scaffold shall be capable of supporting four times the maximum intended load.
3. All scaffolding shall be fully planked with only the proper OSHA-approved planking.
4. Height-to-base ratio shall be 4 to 1 unless the scaffolding is secured to the structure.
5. Access to scaffolding shall be from approved fixed ladders, never from the cross braces.
6. Only experienced and trained employees shall work on a scaffold.
7. Guardrails, including toe boards, are required on all open sides at heights above 10 feet.
8. All proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) shall be worn including hard hats, safety glasses, steel toed boots and hearing protection. Personal fall arrest systems may also be required on certain scaffolding projects.