

SERIOUS INJURY ACCIDENT: April 2010 Miner Falls From Rail Car

A miner with 32 years of experience was seriously injured as he and a co-worker were preparing a rail car for loading. The rail car had been moved into position and the miner was accessing the top of the railcar to open the hatch to the hopper when he lost his balance and fell approximately 15 feet to the ground below. The co-worker found the injured worker on his feet, stumbling and incoherent on the side of the rail car opposite the load-out. Rescue personnel were summoned and the man was transported by helicopter to a hospital for treatment of his injuries. The miner suffered a broken left wrist, a bruised temple, a broken rib, and fractures to his jaw and cheek bone. The broken wrist required surgery to repair.

The Virginia Division of Mineral Mining issued a Notice of Violation to the injured miner for failure to wear fall protection equipment as required by 4 VAC 25-40-1740 of the Virginia Safety and Health Regulations for Mineral Mining. A fall protection system consisting of a series of two retractable lanyards attached to a static line is provided at the load-out facility. Company policy requires that the miner connect the lanyard to his fall protection harness prior to accessing the pivoting step system. The injured miner stated that he did not put his harness on because he was in a hurry.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The accident occurred because the injured miner was in a hurry and did not follow state safety regulations and company safety policies regarding the use of fall protection equipment.
- An adequate fall protection system was provided and training in the use of this system was documented.
- Due to variations in the design of the rail cars being used, the pivoting access steps at the load-out did not make full contact with some cars including the one involved in the accident. This made access especially dangerous without fall protection.

The Division of Mineral Mining recommendations included:

- State regulations and company policies concerning the use of fall protection should be reviewed with all employees.
- Load-out personnel should be retrained in the use of the specific fall protection system utilized at the rail load-out.
- The pivoting steps at the load-out should be re-designed to reduce the fall hazard.

