Electrical Hazards Aren’t Always Overhead

Workers often get into trouble by failing to look up when moving metal ladders, poles and other objects. If such objects touch live overhead power lines, workers are probably dead before they realize what they’ve done.

However, a recent fatality at a condominium construction site in Lowell, MA, shows that electrical hazards can lie beneath as well. Worker Marcos Landaverde, 22, was standing on a scaffold while he installed siding about 20 feet (six meters) above the ground.

An aluminum beam that was supporting one end of the scaffolding suddenly collapsed and touched a 7600-volt power line below. Landaverde, who received a lethal shock, fell to the ground.

OSHA investigators were on the scene trying to determine what caused the beam to fall. Firefighters were not able to reach the young worker until utility workers cut the power. The scaffold beam that failed remained energized until that time, because it was resting against the power line.

While it’s not possible to know whether Landaverde had any options available regarding where he placed the scaffold in relation to the power line, this tragic incident highlights the importance of not erecting scaffolding above power lines if at all possible. A worker may survive a 20-foot fall from a scaffold that fails, but if an energized power line is thrown into the equation, all bets are off.