

# AN ACCIDENT: It Didn't Have to Happen

## *Safety Lessons From a Window Cleaner's Death*

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In August of 1998, a 15-year-old window cleaner's helper died after falling 40 feet from the roof of a medical office building in Washington State. The helper was stationed on the roof to move a window cleaning carriage and assist the window cleaner, who worked from a boatswain's chair as he cleaned the windows of the 4-story building.

On the afternoon of the incident, the window cleaner seated himself in the boatswain's chair and positioned himself over the edge of the roof's parapet. He then "bounced" in the boatswain's chair to make sure it was set to go. Because the carriage was not tied down and did not have counterweights attached, the carriage was pulled over the rooftop's parapet.

Both workers had their fall arrest-harness secured to the carriage. The window cleaner fell straight down while the helper was pulled from the roof by the carriage and struck the ground headfirst. The local emergency medical unit was summoned immediately. The window cleaner's helper died from his injuries at the scene and the window cleaner suffered multiple severe injuries.

The photograph shows the carriage after it struck the ground.

To prevent similar occurrences, the Washington State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program concluded that window cleaners should follow these recommendations/requirements:

Anyone working in or from a roof with a fall exposure should be tied off with a safety line. The safety line should be attached to a specifically engineered independent anchorage point.

An ironic element of this incident is that the window cleaner and his helper were both wearing body harnesses with lanyards attached to an "anchorage" point. The window cleaner's lanyard was attached to a lifeline, but the lifeline in turn was attached to the carriage that was being used on the roof of the building.

Likewise, the window cleaner's helper had his lanyard directly attached to the carriage. The two window cleaning employees were using the roof-top portable carriage as their fall protection anchorage. In this incident, the roof-top portable carriage failed due to not being properly set up and secured.

