

Having been in the roofing industry for over 30 years you can say I have seen it all. In the early days, safety was never a big concern. Getting jobs done in a timely fashion was always the biggest concern and that resulted in many serious injuries and accidents. Lives were ruined due to the lack of safety by both companies and employees alike. These circumstances affected me as young man and moulded me for the future changes that were to occur within the industry. Those changes would take years to implement with many ups and downs along the way. The struggle to make safety the highest priority was worth it as most accidents I have witnessed still haunt me.

Getting hurt can happen at any moment and for many different reasons, including improper training, improper equipment, inclement weather, complacency and lack of common sense. The last one, common sense, seems to be an idea lost to time. Systems and procedures have been implemented to help guard against almost any accident an employer can imagine, except common sense. Common sense is a learned behavior that requires mindfulness and is based on experience, education and training. When it comes to working safely, common sense is only “common” when employees have an awareness and understanding of the risks associated with the work tasks and work conditions. In a dangerous industry, lack of common sense is the biggest threat to the safety of workers and employers.

In my years, I have seen many hazardous situations in my line of work like roofing jacks being torn out while workers are standing on them, tarps blowing away with workers still holding on, workers falling and grabbing the closest person standing next to them and taking that person down as well, and roofers using a pneumatic gun as a hammer and shooting themselves in the eye. All these were serious accidents and life changing incidents. You would hope that these incidents were isolated but they were not. An employer can do as much as possible to prevent incidents from happening but supervisors and employees also have a responsibility to keep themselves and everyone else around them safe; the particular incident I am about to explain is one example when that didn’t happen.

All employees were hired and trained by me. Having 30 years of experience, I taught all aspects of safety but was also present to witness and correct any mistakes on the spot to prevent any accidents from happening. This particular job involved ventilation repair on a large condo complex and the building was over 250 feet long and 50 feet from peak to eaves. To transport material I had 100-foot ropes with fall arrest. The main tool is the catch grab and must be used properly to ensure fall arrest. 50-foot ropes were used to do the actual work again utilizing the fall arrest principle.

My foreman for this job had been previously trained by me for 3 months. The most important aspect of his job was not to bring any new employees up on the roof without me being present. On this particular day, a new employee was starting, and, according to his resume, he had previous fall arrest training. I was 10 minutes late that morning. My site foreman met the employee and went through the harness with him, making sure he understood the system. The employee indicated he understood and appeared eager to start the job and prove himself. Instead of waiting for me to arrive that morning, the site foreman seemingly wanted to prove himself as well and show he could handle all aspects of this job. While I applaud both of their eagerness, this decision would turn out to be disastrous.

Once on the roof, the foreman attached the new employee to the ropes and explained how to use it. The foreman made an unfortunate statement to the new employee and indicated that catch grabs are a drag and will impede your work, so just put it at the end of the rope where the knot is in order to give you free reign. The new employee transferred himself from the 50-foot rope onto the 100-foot and moved his catch grab to the knot, completely eliminating all aspects of fall arrest. I was around the

corner from the job when I got the text message from the foreman advising that the new worker fell. The employee fell 4 stories and still had rope left after hitting the ground.

This accident has had major effects not only on the employee who survived with major injuries but to myself personally and the business as well. I am very grateful the former employee survived and is healthy again after a very lengthy recovery. I have been emotionally destroyed by this. The stress and guilt has damaged my health. Since that day I have not hired any more employees and do all the work myself. This has altered my business dramatically to the point where I will be closing my doors. I have lost all enjoyment in this trade because I never wanted anyone to get hurt on my watch and it happened. I cannot take away the hurt that has been caused, but I can get out of this line of work and avoid losing everything.

Sincerely,  
Rodney Pavlica  
Arctic Air Solutions Inc.

*On August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017 Arctic Air Solutions Inc. pled guilty to charges under the Alberta OHS Code Section 141(1) – Failing to ensure that a worker was trained in the safe use of the fall protection system being used at the work site before allowing that worker to work in an area where a fall protection system must be used. The resulting sentence to Arctic Air Solutions Inc. was a fine of \$40,000 (inclusive of victim fine surcharge) and 18 months' Corporate Probation.*