



Skylight fall protection: More than just the manufacturer's responsibility

By John Lewis

Daylighting helps students' test scores, patients' recovery time, retailers' sales, and workers' and manufacturers' productivity, in addition to providing other benefits. However, disturbing accounts of individuals falling through roof openings, typically reported as skylights, have increased the urgency to develop fall-protection standards and prevention measures.

ASTM developed a work group to investigate the development of skylight fall-protection test standards. However, the issue as presented by ASTM's

Human Impact for Fall-Through Resistance Test Standard Development Work Group does not correlate with the experience of the manufacturer members of the Skylight Council of the American Architectural Manufacturers Association, Schaumburg, Ill.

Early output of this ASTM Work Group attributes skylight injuries to incidents involving other products and conditions such as light transmitting roof panels and uncovered openings unrelated to the skylight products.

The AAMA Skylight Council believes

the responsibility for fall protection must be shared among the many parties involved with the design, construction and maintenance of roofs. The following established safety procedures for minimizing risk should be implemented and followed first as a strong foundation for mitigating the occurrence of all falls from roofs and roof openings. In special circumstances, the use of railings, grids, external or internal screens, or specially designed products meeting a fall-protection standard have been employed.

- Only construction and building maintenance professionals should ever be on a roof, as there are a number of potential fall hazards present, including skylights. Access to a roof is the responsibility of the building owner and should be limited to such personnel by whatever reasonable means necessary.
- Applicable Occupational Safety and Health Administration safety regulations should be complied with at all times when it is necessary for individuals to be on a roof. But, these statutes are vague in defining what constitutes adequate protection.
- All individuals allowed to be on a roof as described above must be fully trained on roof safety by their employer and should have the competence and sense of personal responsibility and personal safety to follow all roof safety practices.
- Signage should be posted by the building owners and managers at each access point on to the roof,


communicating roof safety and inherent dangers.

- Skylights, and the roofs they are mounted in, are designed to resist the applicable environmental load requirements such as snow loads, wind loads, dead loads and in some cases hurricane-induced, wind-borne debris impact loads. Standard design practices do not dictate that they are to be manufactured for human impact or point loads. Warning labels on skylights indicate this, as required by the building codes since 1986.

The issue of fall protection is not new. Manufacturer members of the AAMA Skylight Council have been proactive in improving the safety performance of their products; as manufacturers of a product that is installed on a roof by customers, roof safety issues have been a consideration for some time.

As such, the AAMA Skylight Council's mission is to look objectively at this

issue and all its elements from which the data is derived. The council will continue its commitment to roof safety as presented here and will endeavor to pursue reasonable approaches in the future through the AAMA Fall Protection Task Group, along with continued participation in ASTM's fall protection work group.

To learn more, visit AAMA's Skylight Fall Protection page at www.aamanet.org. 

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