

Investigation Process

What triggers a fatality or catastrophe investigation by the N.C. Department of Labor?

- A worker's death.
- Hospitalization of three or more employees.
- The department may also receive information of a fatality or catastrophe from media reports or referrals from other government agencies.

How is NCDOL notified?

- An employer must notify NCDOL within eight hours of a worker's fatality or the hospitalization of three or more workers.

What will the investigation focus on?

- The investigation will usually be limited to the events surrounding the accident unless observations at the site indicate a broader investigation is needed.

What will happen during the investigation?

- An NCDOL investigator will go to the accident site and collect physical evidence, including photographs.
- The investigator will interview employees, witnesses and management officials about the accident to determine its cause.
- Any violations of safety and health standards will be noted and citations will be issued.

How long will the investigation take?

- An investigation can take anywhere from a few weeks to six months, depending on the complexity of the accident.

When are investigation results disclosed?

- Citations and penalties, if issued, can be released to the public on the issuance date.
- Other contents of the file cannot be released until the case is closed or final order on citations is rendered.



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An employee stands dangerously on top of a stepladder. Ladder manufacturers routinely warn against standing on top of a stepladder.

The Investigation

Investigators will seek to determine several factors, including whether:

- Ladders were maintained in good condition.
- Ladders were inspected frequently, and those with defects were not used.
- Employees were trained in the hazards associated with ladder use.
- Nonconductive ladders were used near electrical equipment.
- Worker faced the ladder when ascending and descending.
- Ladders were placed at a proper angle of one-fourth the working length of the ladder from the vertical wall.
- The top step was not used on a stepladder.
- Ladders were used only for the purpose intended.
- A safety program, including ladder safety, was developed.

Standards: 29 CFR 1910.25–27, Ladders
29 CFR 1926.1053, Ladders

Industry Type: General Industry and Construction

Accident Type: Fall from ladder

Statistical Data: In 2005, NCDOL investigated 80 workplace fatalities. Of the 80, falls accounted for 21 deaths.

What programs does the Department of Labor have in place to prevent falls from ladders?

Construction special emphasis program: Increased training and attention in a dangerous industry.

Free training: Workshops, training and consultation in both English and Spanish.

Publications: Industry guides that pinpoint fall hazards in general industry and construction.