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VINCE VERSACE

The swing stage that came apart at an apartment building on Kipling Avenue has been removed by the labour ministry.

Swing stage collapse underscores the urgent need to share information

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In the wake of the swing-stage collapse that killed four workers on Christmas Eve, there's an urgent need for the sharing of hard facts and conclusive findings, industry stakeholders say.

"There will likely be a whole host of factors which will have some bearing on what happened," says Richard Lyall, president, Residential Construction Council of Central Ontario (RESCON).

"Hopefully the investigation underway is fairly thorough and timely, so if there is any guidance to come out of this and be applied to the industry we can get to it quickly."

On the afternoon of Christmas Eve, four workers plunged 13 storeys to their deaths at a Kipling Avenue apartment work site when a swing stage they were working on came apart.

The accident killed migrant workers Aleksey Blumberg, Fayzullo Fazilov, Alexander Bondorev and Vladimir Korostin.

A fifth worker, Dilshod Marupov of Uzbekistan remains in critical care in hospital after surviving the fall.

The Ontario Ministry of Labour has stated that the accident was a complex one and the investigation is ongoing.

From Oct. 20 to Dec. 17, 2009, the labour ministry conducted nine field visits to the Kipling Avenue work site and issued a total of eight orders to Metron Construction Corp to address safety concerns.

Of the orders, two were stop-work orders — one on Dec. 17 was for a swing stage not involved in the Dec. 24 incident.

The other, on Oct. 20, was for all swing stages at the site.

Upon re-inspection, Metron had addressed all issues raised, according to the ministry.

Many industry insiders say the incident was an “avoidable accident” but further information is needed to make proper conclusions.

"Fall restraints will likely be leading indicators on why this accident happened and if it was avoidable, but we will have to wait and see," says John O'Hara, president, Scaffold Industry Association of Canada, Ontario Chapter. "That area will likely be the main focus of anyone investigating the accident."

Sid Ryan, president, Ontario Federation of Labour, has called on Ontario's attorney general to launch a criminal investigation into the incident.

A widow of one of the deceased has also stated the same in published reports.

Pat Dillon, business manager, Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario, echoes calls for an inquiry.

"A troubling thing for me is when the labour ministry, WSIB (Workplace Safety and Insurance Board), press and industry call these things 'accidents' and I think a more descriptive word is 'manslaughter'," says Dillon.

"When you look at what has taken place in this incident and many others like it and look at the practices being followed, you could almost predict the outcome. That does not fit the definition of the word 'accident'."

Lyll thinks the various calls for an inquiry are "premature" especially with the labour ministry conducting an investigation.

"You need good information to make good decisions," he said. "Right now, there is no information available other than something obviously happened but it does not tell you what exactly happened. It might well be that the ministry's investigation will result in an inquiry taking place."