

# TerranearPMC Safety Share

## Week of June 5, 2017 – On Broadway

We generally think of fall protection for industrial settings. However, many of the real-life visual effects we marvel at during a theatrical performance may also require fall protection: specifically full body harnesses, lanyards AND anchor points. Without this equipment, along with training and inspections and maintenance, persons that dazzle us from the stage are very much in harms' way to the same extent as those who work in construction.

On June 29, 2013, the French actress/acrobatic entertainer, Guyard-Guillot, was performing in the final battle scene of the Las Vegas Cirque du Soleil Production of *Kà*, when something went wrong. Her fall protection equipment failed, causing her to plunge about 100 feet to her death. The stage was configured vertically for this scene and therefore, required performers to use harnesses that were attached to cables that would enable them to move about. Guyard-Guillot was hoisted up the side of the stage where, according to eye witnesses, she "then just plummeted down." Her harness apparently slipped free from its safety wire, causing her to fall into a pit.

A spokesperson confirmed that the harness itself remained on Guyard-Guillot during her fall. And while many spectators initially thought that this was part of the choreographed fight, it was soon realized that something was wrong as they could hear screaming and groaning while hearing a female voice crying from the stage. At this point the show was quickly stopped and a recording asked the audience to leave and said refunds would be offered. Meanwhile, the other performers watched helplessly as they dangled in the air, before being lowered to safety, one by one.

Guyard-Guillot died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. This was the first on-stage accident resulting in death in Cirque du Soleil's 30-year history.

After a nearly four-month investigation, Nevada OSHA concluded that Guillot-Guyard fell after the wire rope broke causing multiple blunt force trauma. OSHA's findings indicated that the wire rope suspending Guillot-Guyard "was severed due to the rapid ascent of the performer, ultimately causing the rope to be freed from the sheave/pulley and scraping against a shear point." In other words, the wire had shifted out of the disk in the pulley housing and was cut as a result of the combined tension of Guillot-Guyard's weight and the torque from the electric motor that was designed to pull her up the show's moveable stage.

As a result of the OSHA investigation, inspectors issued six citations against Cirque and three against MGM Grand. Cirque's citations included a failure to "protect or prevent 'Ka' employees from striking an overhead grid." This matches reports from those familiar with the "Ka" staging, verifying that Guillot-Guyard did hit the metal grid over the stage as she ascended high above the final battle scene, which jarred the rope that connected her to her harness.

The report also cited Cirque for failing to "provide proper training for the use of equipment and tasks used in the battle scene." Nevada OSHA also cited Cirque du Soleil for removing equipment from a fatality site before Nevada OSHA authorized the dismantling and removal of the equipment which involved 38 feet of wire rope that was attached to the victim at the time of the accident.



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Monetary penalties issued to Cirque were \$25,235. Those against MGM Grand were \$7,000. That's a little over \$32,000; hardly worth the price of Guyard-Guillot's life; especially when one understands that this unfortunate incident could have easily prevented by proper training and proper inspection of fall protection equipment.

At about the same time, across the United States, on New York City's Broadway, another theatrical accident was occurring - and once again, the focus of the investigation was fall protection. The production was "Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark" and in this specific case, Spider-Man was on a bridge, and the heroine, Mary Jane, was dangling from it. While choreography called for spider man to swoop across the bridge and save Mary Jane, the audience saw the actor fall to the ground. At the same moment, members of the audience were able to see spider man's harness flick off his back and fly backward.

*Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark* began its Broadway debut in 2010. It was a musical with the music and lyrics written by U2's Bono and The Edge. The musical is based on the Spider-Man comics created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, published by Marvel Comics, as well as the 2002 film about the character, and the Greek myth of Arachne. It tells the story of the character's origin, his romance with Mary Jane and his battles with the evil Green Goblin. The show includes highly technical stunts, such as actors swinging from "webs" and several aerial combat scenes.

During this particular evening, Reeve Carney was the actor who played Spider-Man; however, the play incorporates nine people to perform Spider-Man's stunts when the character is masked.

Similar to the Cirque du Soleil Production of *Kà*, the accident occurred near the end of the show while prompting an investigation by the state OSHA agency. From the investigation, OSHA concluded that employees were exposed to the hazards of falls as well as being struck during flying routines because of improperly adjusted or unsecured safety harnesses. An additional fall hazard stemmed from unguarded open-side floors that lacked fall protection. It was also determined that the company failed to shield employees from being struck by moving overhead rigging components.

Initially, the production company insisted that it was human error was to blame. But the legal papers contend that the injured actor sustained "severe and permanent bodily injury as a result of a lift machine that malfunctioned."

These conditions resulted in the issuance of the three serious citations, with a total of \$12,600 in proposed fines. OSHA issues a serious citation when there is substantial probability that death or serious physical harm could result from a hazard about which the employer knew or should have known. Once again, similar to the *Ka* event, the monetary penalties were mere tokens that cannot begin to compensate the injuries sustained by the actor.

Since this initial episode, there have been two other similar incidents during its production; both involved stuntmen. Fortunately, unlike the Cirque du Soleil Production, none of these incidents resulted in a fatality; although the performers suffered serious injuries. After the third incident, the show finally closed its doors.

**Knowledge is of no value unless you put it into practice - Anton Chekhov**

