

# Cell tower industry under scrutiny after worker accidents

The number of workers who climb cell phone towers in the U.S. is fairly small, with about 10,000 workers, yet it has been called the most dangerous job in the nation. After a spate of serious or fatal worker accidents starting in 2013, news organizations reported this week that the government is changing how it investigates accidents involving tower climbers.

An article written by the nonprofit journalism group ProPublica and published on philly.com found that there were 19 deaths to climbers due to falls or other accidents involving communications towers since January 2013. Others have been seriously injured, including a 24-year-old man who fell 50 feet from a cell site in Pennsylvania last year. His wife said he was in a coma for months.

In part, the increase in accidents happened as the need for upgraded and expanded cellular networks increased. News organizations previously reported that tower owners and cell carriers had delegated the work to layers of subcontractors, which protected them from liability for worker injuries.

Workers who are injured on the job are generally eligible for workers' compensation benefits. The federal Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) may also investigate the accident to determine whether employers violated safety rules. OSHA is now changing how it deals with investigations of injuries to tower climbers.

The agency recently announced it will track which companies subcontractors were working for when cell tower accidents happen and obtaining documents that explains the company

relationships. Last fall, OSHA instructed its employees to inspect any tower worksites they see.

The goal is to boost worker safety and increase worker safety. OSHA director David Michaels says that carriers and owners of towers share responsibility for safety.

**Source:** philly.com, "[Feds to probe the 'Most Dangerous Job in America'](#)" □ Liz Day, ProPublica, April 1, 2014