

12. Drowning

A **31-year-old** construction worker drowned when he attempted to step across from one barge structure to another and fell into the water. The project consisted of new bridge construction on a Tennessee river to replace an existing old bridge. The employees were installing the steel rebar reinforcing frame for the bridge. They were working from two barges in the water each holding a crane for lifting and positioning the materials. Employees crossed between the two barges at the narrowest point between the two where the distance between the barges was approximately 22 inches. Employees crossed the barges by stepping across the 22-inch-wide gap between the barges. Several employees crossed the gap around the same time as the victim and the incident was witnessed by those employees still in the area. As he stepped across the gap, the victim's fall protection lanyard became tangled on a vertical post used to tie off the barge. The entangled lanyard pulled him backward causing him to lose his balance. He fell off the southwest corner of the barge into the 50-degree water. One co-worker lay down on the barge and held out his hand to the victim to try to rescue him but was unsuccessful as the victim was struggling to get his head above water. Another co-worker threw the life ring to a position directly above the victim, whose life jacket had come off his body and was floating just above his head. The straps of the life jacket were wrapped around the victim's wrist. Other co-workers made attempts to reach out and grab the victim but none were close enough to save him. They could only watch as he sank and drowned. One person finally jumped into the water in an attempt to save the victim but could not find him.

Citations as Originally Issued

Citation 1

Item 1 1926.21(b)(2)	The employer failed to instruct each employee on the recognition and avoidance of unsafe conditions and the regulations applicable to the work environment to control or eliminate any hazards or other exposure to illness or injury.
Item 2 1926.605(b)(2)	Unless employees can step safely to or from the wharf, float, barge, or river towboat, either a ramp or a safe walkway shall be provided.

