

OSHA FactSheet

Preventing Falls

Falls and falling objects can result from unstable working surfaces, ladders that are not safely positioned, and misuse of fall protection. Workers are also subject to falls or to the dangers of falling objects if sides and edges, floor holes, and wall openings are not protected. Any time a worker is at a height of six feet or more (construction industry) or four feet or more (general industry), the worker must be protected.

Fall Protection

Fall protection must be provided for each employee on a walking/working surface with an unprotected side or edge at the height required by the OSHA standard applicable to their work environment. Management is required to:

- Develop, implement and commit to a fall protection program
- Provide training on the fall protection program
- Evaluate the program on a regular basis to insure the program's effectiveness and determine whether it needs to be changed or updated

Employers are required to assess the workplace to determine if the walking/working surfaces on which employees are to work have the strength and structural integrity to safely support workers. Once employers have determined that the surface is safe for employees to work on, the employer must select one of the options listed for the work operation if a fall hazard is present.

- Where protection is required, select fall protection systems appropriate for given situations.
- Use proper construction and installation of safety systems.
- Supervise employees properly.
- Train workers in the proper selection, use, and maintenance of fall protection systems.

Unprotected Sides, Wall Openings, and Floor Holes

Almost all sites have unprotected sides and edges, wall openings, or floor holes at some point during construction. If these sides and openings are not protected at your site, injuries from falls or falling objects may result, ranging from sprains and concussions to death.

- Use at least one of the following whenever

employees are exposed to a fall of 6 feet or more [see comment above] above a lower level:

- Guardrail Systems
- Safety Net Systems
- Fall Arrest Systems
- Cover or guard floor holes as soon as they are created.
- Guard or cover any openings or holes immediately.
- Construct all floor hole covers so they will effectively support two times the weight of employees, equipment, and materials that may be imposed on the cover at any one time.
- In general, it is better to use fall prevention systems, such as guardrails, than fall protection systems, such as safety nets or fall arrest devices.

Ladders

You risk falling if portable ladders are not safely positioned each time they are used. While you are on a ladder, it may move and slip from its supports. You can also lose your balance while getting on or off an unsteady ladder. Falls from ladders can cause injuries ranging from sprains to death.

- Position portable ladders so the side rails extend at least 3 feet above the landing
- Secure side rails at the top to a rigid support and use a grab device when 3 foot extension is not possible.
- Make sure that the weight on the ladder will not cause it to slip off its support.
- Before each use, inspect ladders for cracked, broken, or defective parts.
- Do not apply more weight on the ladder than it is designed to support.
- Use only ladders that comply with OSHA standards.

This is one in a series of informational fact sheets highlighting OSHA programs, policies or standards. It does not impose any new compliance requirements. For a comprehensive list of compliance requirements of OSHA standards or regulations, refer to Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations. This information will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. The voice phone is (202) 693-1999; teletypewriter (TTY) number: (877) 889-5627.

