

Fall Protection

It may seem that a job can be performed more efficiently without spending the time to protect against falls. However, falls remain one of the top causes of fatalities in construction. Workers have fallen off edges of every description, especially floors and roofs, and through openings in floors, roofs, and walls. Fall protection is required whenever a worker faces serious risk of injury, including:

- on structures where a worker could fall more than 7 feet
- on thrustouts, trusses, beams, purlins, and plates at heights over 15 feet
- on a sloped roof

To prevent accidental falls at worksites, guardrails and toeboards or other effective barriers to falls should be used. However, there will be areas where guardrails or other barriers are not feasible. In these cases, workers must use approved personal fall protection systems or positioning devices.

Two basic types of person fall protection systems that require tie off are fall arrest and travel restraint. Fall arrest systems stop a fall within a few feet of the worker's original position. A full body harness is required with a fall arrest system. The system typically consists of a full body harness, a lanyard, a rope grab, a lifeline, and a lifeline anchor. A fall arrest system must be worn when working on a rolling scaffold that is being moved or when a worker is getting on, working from or getting off suspended access equipment.

A travel restraint system prevents falls by restraining a worker from getting too close to an unprotected edge. This system usually consists of a safety belt or full body harness, a lanyard, a rope grab, a lifeline, and a lifeline anchor.

When conventional fall protection or personal fall protection are not practical, safety nets must be used instead. Before using safety nets, check to see that the nets are hung with enough clearance to prevent a falling person from hitting the surface or structure below.

Safety nets should be placed within 10 vertical feet and never more than 30 feet below the working surface. Nets must extend at least eight feet beyond the building or structure. If the vertical distance from the working level to the net is greater than 5 feet, then the net must extend 10 feet beyond the building. A net from 10 feet to 30 feet below the working surface must extend 13 feet.

If you use any type of fall protection equipment, including personal fall protection or safety nets, be sure to check that you are using the right equipment for the job, labeled as meeting the requirements of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), and that the equipment is in good condition.

Whenever feasible, employers should always set up temporary floors, guardrails, toeboards, or other physical barriers to falls, instead of having workers rely on tying off and nets for fall protection. When not feasible, personal fall protection or safety nets must be used. No work should proceed unless the necessary fall protection is in place. The use of fall protection can prevent serious injury and save your life.

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