



RISK MANAGEMENT ADVISORY
Utica National Insurance Risk Management Department Bulletin

Construction Series

Think Safety!

Preventing Falls

Business Case

Construction is a potentially high hazard industry for those who work in it, with falls at the top of the hazards list. In fact, falls are the most frequent cause of fatalities at construction sites and annually account for one of every three construction-related deaths. Although there are commonly available methods for preventing falls, the number of construction workers who fall to their deaths has increased in recent years. According to preliminary 2007 fatality data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), there were at least 442 construction worker fatalities during 2007 as a result of falls from all causes.

Of this total, falls from roofs are one specific concern at construction sites and the most frequent cause for fatal falls in construction in 2007. BLS reports that from 2003 to 2007, construction worker falls from roofs resulted in 686 fatalities.

General

Falls and falling objects can result from unstable working surfaces, ladders 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 6 feet or more (construction industry) or 4 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.

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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 or 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

Workers risk falling if portable ladders are not safely positioned each time they are used. While an employee is on a ladder, it may move and slip from its supports. A worker can also lose their 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 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.

To access detailed information on the OSHA website, Control+click on the following link: [Preventing Fatal Falls in Construction.](#)

Recommended uses:

- New hire training and orientation
- Periodic tool box meetings
- Pre-job Planning
- Job Safety Analysis
- Accident Investigation

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