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Fall Protection In Construction

These OSHA standards apply to most construction workers, except those involved in inspecting, investigating or assessing workplace conditions before work has started or after work has been completed.

Employers must protect their employees from falls, identify and evaluate fall hazards, and provide their employees training on how to avoid falls, according to Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) construction industry safety standards. OSHA also requires employers to provide fall protection for employees on scaffolds and ladders, and for employees who erect steel buildings.

Fall Hazards

The OSHA standards identify areas or activities in which fall protection is needed, including, but not limited to:

- Ramps
- Runways
- Walkways
- Excavations
- Hoist areas
- Holes
- Formwork and reinforcing steel
- Leading-edge work
- Unprotected sides and edges
- Overhand bricklaying and related work
- Roofing work
- Precast concrete erection
- Wall openings
- Residential construction
- Other walking/working surfaces

The rule sets a uniform threshold height of 6 feet. This means a construction employer must protect his or her employee from fall hazards and falling objects whenever an affected employee is 6 feet or more above a lower level.

Employers are able to select fall protection measures compatible with the type of work being performed. Fall protection generally can be provided through the use of:

- Guard rails
- Safety net systems
- Personal fall arrest systems (consisting of anchorage points, connectors, body harness, deceleration device, lifeline or suitable combinations)
- Positioning devices
- Warning line systems

RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION

OSHA's fall protection guidelines for residential construction identify certain tasks that may be performed without the use of conventional fall protection and doesn't require written fall protection plans if certain guidelines are followed. This relieves the residential homebuilder from the obligation to show "infeasibility or greater hazard" when electing to use alternative plans in lieu of conventional fall protection.

Controlled access zones (CAZ) are an example of alternative fall protection methods. Before any non-conventional fall protection systems can be used, an experienced person must clearly define the CAZ as an area where a recognized hazard exists and specify the CAZ through signs, wires, tapes, ropes or chains.

On walls 8 feet or less, employees must install scaffolds along the interior wall below the location where the trusses/rafters will be erected. In structures with walls higher than 8 feet, where scaffolds and ladders would create a greater hazard, safe-working procedures must be followed when working on the top plate and monitored by the crew supervisor.

Roof sheathing operations typically occur after trusses/rafters are in place and, therefore, cannot be protected by conventional fall systems until a specific amount of sheathing is in place. However, installing the bottom row of sheathing while standing on truss webs is an alternative method. A slide guard is then securely attached to the roof equaling the same width. Slide guards are to be no less than 4 inches in height to ensure fall protection.

First-floor joists or trusses must be rolled into position and secured either from the ground, ladders or sawhorse scaffold. With the exception of the first row of sheathing, which will be installed from ladders or the ground, employees must work from the established deck. Any employee not assisting in leading-edge work while leading edges still exist is not permitted within 6 feet of the construction.

Before starting any wall erection activities, clear indicators, including a painted line 6 feet from the perimeter, is required to warn of the approaching unprotected edge. Employees constructing exterior walls must complete as much cutting of materials and other preparation as possible away from the edge of the deck.

TRAINING

Employers must provide a training program to teach potentially exposed employees how to recognize and minimize fall hazards. Training must include:

- Nature of fall hazards in the work area.
- Correct procedures for erecting, maintaining, disassembling and inspecting fall-protection systems.
- Use and operation of controlled access zones and guardrails, personal fall arrests, safety nets, warning lines and safety monitoring systems.
- Role of each employee in the active safety monitoring system.
- Limitations on the use of mechanical equipment during the performance of roofing work on low-slope roofs.
- Correct procedures for equipment and materials handling and storage, and the erection of overhead protection.
- Employees' role in fall protection plans.

For detailed information regarding OSHA fall protection standards, refer to the OSHA Internet site at **www.osha.gov.**

For more information about American Family's Loss Control Services, visit www.amfam.com

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