Fall Protection Meeting Kit

Working at heights is any work where a person could fall a distance and be injured. This event might include, for example, falling from a step ladder, off of a roof, or through an unguarded hole in the ground or floor. Fall protection may also be required when working above an open-top tank, bin, hopper, or vat.

FALLS IN THE WORKPLACE – CAUSES

OSHA requires that fall protection be provided at elevations of four feet in general industry workplaces, five feet in shipyards, six feet in the construction industry and eight feet in longshoring operations. In addition, OSHA requires that fall protection be provided when working over dangerous equipment and machinery, regardless of the fall distance.

WORKERS FALL DESPITE PREVENTION EFFORTS

- Unguarded leading edges
- Open holes
- Improper or missing guardrails
- Damaged equipment (ladders, stairs, safety equipment, etc.)
- Unmarked elevation changes
- working conditions such as poor lighting, slippery walking surfaces, and poor housekeeping practices exist;
- fall-protection equipment is not available, not used, or is misused;
- work practices are poor due to unclear job procedures, lack of training for workers and workers rushing and taking short-cuts to meet deadlines.

BEST PRACTICES TO AVOID FALLS IN THE WORKPLACE

The best way to avoid falls is by eliminating work tasks that require working at heights in the first place. Elimination is not

always possible so the risk of falling has to be mitigated through safeguards.

- Engineering controls such as physical barriers and guardrails are two fall prevention systems that are effective in preventing falls from heights.
- Using a proper fall arrest system such as a full body harness, self-retracting lanyard, and approved anchor point with 100% tie-off is another way to prevent or mitigate the consequences of a fall.
- Proper use of ladders. This includes using three points of contact when climbing, not leaning to one side while on the ladder, setting the ladder at the proper angle, securing the ladder, etc.
- Proper housekeeping in work areas is important in preventing falls at the same level as well as falls from heights.
- Warning signs and other methods of communicating fall hazards to nearby workers.

OSHA FALL PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Effective fall protection comes in two basic forms: **fall restraint systems** and **fall arrest systems**.

Guardrails and handrails

- Guardrails must include top rails, midrails, and posts, and must be 42 inches’ high
- Stair rails must be securely fastened to or mounted on a wall or partition, and be 30 to 34 inches above the surface

Toe boards

- Use barriers at the base of a working area, and prevent tools from falling or employees’ feet from slipping over an edge
- Must be at least four inches high, be securely fastened in place, and have no more than 1/4-inch clearance above floor level

Full-body or chest harness

- Keeps an employee suspended in the event of a fall
- Body belts, which work in conjunction with harnesses, are not by themselves considered acceptable as part of a personal fall arrest system in the construction industry and should be used only for positioning.

Safety net

- May be used up to a distance of 25 feet below the working surface
- Especially useful on construction sites

Proper scaffolding

- When scaffolding is at least 10 feet above the lower level, a competent person must determine the feasibility and safety requirements for providing fall protection for employees building or dismantling scaffolds
- Scissor lifts are considered to be scaffolding and require fall protection when at least 10 feet off the ground; however, most scissor lifts are outfitted with guardrails, which satisfies OSHA’s fall protection requirement
- When working on suspended scaffolding, employees must be tied to an anchor point or use a fall protection system that’s not connected to the scaffold

TRAINING, TRAINING, TRAINING

Without proper and timely training both at the onset of employment and updated refresher programs, all the words of caution and prevention of fall dangers and hazards will go unanswered.

All new and current employees should be given instructions on the proper use of fall protection devices before they begin to work. Prior to permitting employees into areas where fall hazards exist, all employees must also be trained regarding fall protection plan requirements.

FINAL WORD

There are many factors that can cause or contribute to a fall occurring in the workplace. Unsafe conditions paired with unsafe actions of workers while working at heights is a recipe for disaster.