Falls Through Floor and Wall opening

Safety Talk

What’s at Stake?

It takes a split-second of inattention, a slight change in working conditions, a forgetful co-worker, or a lax safety program for you to fall through an opening.

Painful injuries, head trauma, and disability are all possible outcomes of surviving a fall. If you don’t survive your family and friends are left to cope without you. If you are the forgetful co-worker who didn’t put the cover back on the floor or wall opening, you will have a lifetime of guilt if someone falls to their death.

What’s the Danger?

All types of floor and wall openings and are dangerous if not properly covered; a fall through any of them can lead to disabling injuries and death.

Example

A construction worker unknowingly entered a room with an unprotected floor opening and fell 14ft/4.2m, landing on a piece of steel. He died from his injuries.

How to Protect Yourself

Here are six ways to protect yourself and others from falls through floor openings:

1. Barricade openings in floors, roofs, and walls with guardrails or securely cover them so no one can accidentally step into them.
    - Guardrails must be installed according to standard guardrail heights.

    - Barricades must remain in place until the opening is permanently closed.
2. Covers for openings must be made of solid material that is able to support any load placed on it.
    - Many fatalities have occurred when someone stepped on foam board, roofing paper, or cardboard that was covering an opening.
3. Covers must be secured so they can’t be easily removed.
    - A loose sheet of plywood placed over a floor opening has led to many fatal falls.
4. Covers should go over the entire opening unless guardrails are installed.
    - If the cover doesn’t cover the entire opening, you could step on it and the cover could break or tip into the hole – taking you with it.
5. Hole covers must be color-coded or marked “HOLE” or “COVER” as a warning.
    - Without the markings, someone could pick up a piece of plywood, not realizing it’s safeguarding a hazard and leave the hole unprotected.
6. Report any uncovered openings to your supervisor.
    - If you can properly cover it – do so immediately. If you can’t, wait by hole (at a safe distance) and warn others until the hole is covered.

Final Word

Falls through openings are unnecessary tragedies. Always secure, guard and/or cover these deathtraps.