

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.