Scaffold Safety Meeting Kit

WHAT’S AT STAKE

Scaffold work gives you access to hard-to-reach places rooftops, ceilings, and upper floors, but that access comes with serious risk. If a scaffold collapses, if someone falls, or if a tool drops from overhead, the consequences can be fatal. One missed inspection, one missing guardrail, or one unstable footing can turn a simple job into a tragedy. A stable scaffold can get the job done — an unsafe one can take a life.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

Scaffolds are essential for many construction, painting, and maintenance jobs — but they can also be one of the most dangerous pieces of equipment on site when not handled correctly.

Falls from Height — The #1 Killer on Scaffolds

Falls are the most common — and most deadly — scaffold hazard. A missing guardrail, slippery plank, or a worker standing on an improvised ladder can turn a simple job into a fatal incident. Workers often assume the platform is safe without checking if proper fall protection is in place. In many cases, people fall because they weren’t tied off, the planking shifted, or they stepped backward without looking.

Scaffold Collapse — When the Structure Fails You

Scaffolds might look sturdy, but if they’re not assembled according to the manufacturer’s specs — or if they’re set on unstable or uneven ground — they can collapse. Common causes include:

- Overloading with too much weight (people, materials, or tools)
- Missing pins, loose connections, or makeshift repairs

- Weak foundations, especially when placed on gravel, mud, or wet surfaces

Falling Tools and Materials – Danger from Above- A hard hat is important – but it won't always save you if a tool or brick drops from two stories up. Workers sometimes leave materials unsecured on planks, or accidentally knock them off while working. A 5-lb tool dropped from 20 feet can strike with the force of over 1,000 lbs. People walking or working below the scaffold may never see it coming.

Electrocution – The Hidden Hazard – Scaffolds made of metal or set up too close to overhead power lines pose an electrocution risk. It's not just the person at the top who's in danger – current can travel through the entire scaffold frame. The minimum safe distance from power lines varies by voltage – but 10 feet is often the starting rule. Electrocution incidents are often fatal or cause severe burns and neurological damage.

Weather, Wind, and Human Error – Wind gusts, rain, ice, and poor lighting all increase the danger of working on scaffolds. Add to that the risk of human error – such as skipping inspection, moving parts without permission, or climbing with tools in hand – and you've got a recipe for disaster., and use behind them.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Staying safe on a scaffold means treating it with the same respect you'd give to any high-risk equipment. These structures might look simple, but every rail, board, and frame has a job to do – and skipping one step or cutting one corner could put your life, and your coworkers' lives, on the line.

Do a Full Pre-Use Inspection – Every Time

Before you step on a scaffold, stop and check. Look at the base plates – are they sitting on firm, level ground? Are the frames plumb and braced? Are the guardrails in place and secure? Check the planks for cracks, splits, or slippery surfaces, and make sure there are no missing pins or loose connections.

- Confirm weight limits: Is the scaffold rated for how many workers and materials are going up?
- If anything looks off, don’t climb. Tag it and report it — your life’s worth more than a few minutes of work.

Use Fall Protection When Required

Scaffolds over 10 feet often require fall protection, either in the form of guardrails or personal fall arrest systems. Know what’s required on your site and use it — no excuses.

- Wear a full-body harness and make sure your lanyard is secured to an approved anchor point.
- Never unclip “just for a second” — that’s all it takes for something to go wrong.

Keep the Deck Clear and Clutter-Free

Loose tools, tangled cords, or piles of material are trip hazards. A clear work platform gives you room to move and react if something unexpected happens.

- Secure tools with lanyards if working at height
- Keep materials stacked safely away from edges

Use Ladders or Access Points — Don’t Climb the Frame — Scaffold frames aren’t ladders. Always use the designated ladder or access gate to get on or off the platform. Climbing the cross braces might feel faster — until you slip and fall.

Respect Weather Conditions — High winds, rain, snow, or ice can make scaffolds dangerous fast. If the platform is slippery or swaying, don’t risk it. Talk to your supervisor about delaying the work or using alternate methods.

Stay Clear of Power Lines — Know the location of all overhead lines. Keep a minimum clearance of at least 10 feet — more if voltage is higher. Never build or move scaffolds near energized sources without a full hazard assessment.

FINAL WORD

Scaffolds are a common sight on job sites — but that doesn’t make them low-risk. Every year, workers are seriously injured or killed because of unstable platforms, missing guardrails, or skipped inspections.