

Fall protection

Introduction:

The US Department of Labor lists falls as one of the leading causes of traumatic occupational death, accounting for eight percent of all occupational fatalities from trauma.

- Construction safety standards require that anytime you are more than 6 feet above the ground, fall protection is required.
- General industry standards dictate fall protection measures at four feet.

Hazards to watch for:

- Leading edge work—roofs, bridges, etc.
- Roof holes and manholes
- Ramps and runways
- Steel erection
- Articulating lifts
- Bore pits and shafts
- Work over open tanks

Issues to consider:

1. Make fall protection needs part of your pre-task planning.
2. Use compatible fall arrest equipment.
3. Ensure sturdy construction and adequate anchor points.
4. Think about rescue operations and tolerable suspension times for personal fall arrest systems.
5. Body belts may only be used as positioning devices—not as part of a personal fall arrest system.

Some options for fall protection:

- Covers
- Guardrail systems
- Personal fall arrest systems
- Positioning devices
- Warning lines
- Controlled access zones (CAZs)
- Safety net systems

Safe procedures:

1. When using a cover, be sure it's secure and labeled. Paint the word "hole" on the cover.
2. Use fall protection when installing guardrails. Guardrails must meet OSHA criteria.
3. Personal fall arrest systems must be properly selected, maintained, inspected and utilized. Do not mix components from different models.
4. Warning lines must be erected around all open sides of the work area and should be at least 6 feet back from the edge. Clearly mark the lines with high visibility flags.
5. Use controlled access zones (CAZ) only when no other form of fall protection is feasible. Have a job-specific fall protection plan explaining the requirements when using a CAZ.

In conclusion:

Don't gamble with fall protection. Understand your needs, select the right system, be trained on use, inspect components frequently and communicate with others.