

Property & Casualty Newsletter

February 2019: Safety & Loss Control

Fall Protection on Construction Sites

Falls continue to be a serious hazard in the construction industry. Between 1982 and 2015, 42% of construction fatalities involved falls*. Fifty-four percent of the workers killed had no access to a personal fall arrest system (PFAS), and 23% had access to a PFAS but did not use it. In 2016 alone, of the 991 total construction worker deaths, 37% resulted from falls to a lower level**.

In every case, these deaths were preventable.

You can prevent falls from heights on jobsites by remembering these three vital but simple steps: **Plan. Provide. Train.**

Plan.

When planning a construction job that will have exposure to falls from six feet or higher, ensure the work will be done safely. Simple solutions are best, but never take shortcuts. Does the structure provide for robust anchors capable of supporting 5,000 lbs. for each worker connection? Will a substantial railing system work?

Also, have you been involved in pre-con meetings to discuss constraints of the jobsite? Has the Project Manager and/or Superintendent made certain that the crew leads are aware of how the job will be done, what tasks will be involved, and what safety equipment will be required? Are crews updated regularly on jobsite changes (frequent on construction projects)?

If you don't already, consider conducting Job Hazard Analyses (JHA) on non-routine or problematic jobs. JHAs can be a hugely valuable management tool in terms of both safety and production.

Write out special instructions on work orders. As an added step you can color-code and highlight instructions on the blueprints indicating danger areas.

Finally, inspect the jobsite frequently to monitor performance. Don't let your careful planning be ignored or misinterpreted. Are floor holes covered or guarded? Are guardrails in place and secure? When guardrails come down, even briefly, is another form of fall protection in place? Are workers aware of activity below and protecting their tools and materials from falling? How is jobsite housekeeping? It's important to be vigilant and eliminate potential trip hazards.

Success is in the details.

Provide.

Be sure that every job with fall potential has appropriate fall protection equipment. All the necessary equipment should be planned out ahead of time. Do you have enough of the right gear or will you have to make an investment? Are the costs of fall protection part of your bid? Is your fall protection equipment inspected regularly and in good condition?

Train.

Don't neglect training your employees in the proper setup and safe use of their fall protection equipment. Set aside a time and place for undistracted training. "On the fly" (on-site and just before the job begins) may not be beneficial. Don't belabor the minutia, but make sure they know everything they need to know.

Not every worker understands everything you say. Whether it's a lack of experience, distractions, or a language barrier, take steps to verify that they hear and understand your instructions and expectations. Do hands-on training and let workers demonstrate their proficiency. Ask questions of workers after the training to assess their understanding.

Keep this in mind as the job gets rolling: just because you talked about it doesn't mean every worker remembers every detail right from the start. Be sure to follow up, frequently at first. Sometimes they'll need constructive reminders.

Different situations and exposures require different practices and protections. When working from ladders, workers should maintain three points of contact, keep the ladder on a level surface, secure the ladder by locking its spreaders, and refrain from overreaching side-to-side.

Scaffolding is safe to use if it's done right. Set-up, dismantling, or altering of access, bracing, decks, and railings should be done by an experienced crew and under the supervision of a competent person, including daily inspection before use.

For roof work, employees should know how their fall arrest harness should fit, that their anchor points are secure, and to stay 100% tied off while they're "up there."

Remember, hazard awareness is the goal of all meaningful training. You can teach step one, step two, and step three, but construction projects are seldom so predictable. Workers need to learn how to recognize hazardous situations and be prepared and empowered to address them constructively as they happen.

For more information on safely working at heights, visit [osha.gov/stopfalls](https://www.osha.gov/stopfalls) or call on a Moreton Safety & Loss Control specialist. They are always eager to help you help your employees work safely.

* "CDC - Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program: Main Page - NIOSH Workplace Safety and Health Topic." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed February 13, 2019. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/face/default.html>.

** "UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR." Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Accessed February 13, 2019. <https://www.osha.gov/oshstats/commonstats.html>.



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