Falls in the Construction Industry Meeting Kit

Fall Protection in the Construction Industry

Falls are the leading cause of death in the construction industry, but these are easily preventable. Numerous OSHA guidelines provide the framework for a safer construction site.

Falls from heights is one of the leading causes for injuries and fatalities in the workplace and in the home. In the construction industry, falls are the leading cause of fatalities. In 2018, there were 320 fatal falls to a lower level out of 1,008 construction fatalities (BLS data).

KEY RULE:

One key rule mandates that employers provide fall protection when an employee is working six feet or more above a lower level—or 10 feet when working on a scaffold.

The only exception to this rule is when an employer can demonstrate that such a system is infeasible or when the hazard is increased by using the system. In these cases, an employer must develop a fall protection plan specific to the site where the work is performed.

OTHER MORE SPECIFIC RULES IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY INCLUDE:

- Employees must be protected from falling through holes (including skylights) more than six feet above lower levels. This may be done through personal fall arrest systems, covers, or guardrail systems around the hole(s).
- Employees on the face of formwork or reinforcing steel must be protected from falling six feet or more to lower levels by personal fall arrest systems, safety nets, or other positioning device systems.
- Guardrails must protect employees on ramps, runways, and other walkways from falling six feet or more onto lower levels.
- Employees working near excavations, wells, pits, and shafts six feet or deeper must be protected from falling by guardrails, fences, barricades, covers, or other visual barriers.
- Employees working above dangerous equipment must be protected from falling.
- If the employee is less than six feet above the equipment, a guardrail systems or equipment guards must be used.
- If the employee is six feet or more above the dangerous equipment, guardrails, personal fall arrest systems, or safety nets must be used.

5 SAFETY TIPS TO PREVENT FALLS IN CONSTRUCTION

Accounting for more than a third of all deaths in the industry, falls are the leading cause of fatalities in construction. Most upsetting is the fact that these deaths are preventable. Construction workers are often required to work from roofs, scaffolds and ladders, which are where most fatal falls occur.

1) Think about your site conditions

Often times, construction workers do not consider slips and trips to be “falls,” but they are included under the fall category of the Focus Four Hazards. In fact, back, neck, ankle and knee injuries, which can be brought on by slips and trips, account for the greatest number of lost time cases in the construction industry.

2) Plan your work

With the construction industry’s hectic pace, it’s easy to get caught up on schedules and push planning by the wayside. Planning your work is not only critical to ensuring the success of a project though, it helps minimize safety hazards. By looking at what type of work will be conducted, the types of tasks and tools that will be involved, and accessing the necessary Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), workers can better prepare for the workday ahead. Additionally, when estimating the cost of a job, employers should always include safety equipment and plan to have all necessary tools and equipment at the jobsite.

3) Use the right equipment for the right jobs

It is extremely important to choose the right equipment for the right jobs. With so many types of fall protection equipment available for workers, it can be difficult to determine which is best to use for which job. When used properly, beamers, retractables, rope-grabs, beam straps, butterfly anchors, concrete plunger anchors and retractable lanyards can all save lives. However, if the right equipment is not selected for the right task, not only could it not prevent a fatality, it could be a contributing factor.

4) Remember that training is key

Rarely does OSHA issue just one citation for a fall protection violation– it is almost always at least two. Employers are often cited for lack of training in addition to a witnessed violation. Providing your employees with the right equipment is simply not enough. You must train them on the proper use of the equipment including its limitations, how to care for it and when it is needed.

5) Plan. Provide. Train.

Remembering these three steps can make protecting your employees from falls much easier. Plan ahead to get the job done safely and efficiently. Make sure your company is using engineering controls and work rules for protection when possible. When that’s not possible, make sure only the most effective PPE is used. Once you’ve planned the appropriate PPE, provide it to your employees. Before providing employees with the appropriate PPE though, make sure to train them on how to use it properly, including its limitations.

FINAL WORD

Compliance with OSHA standards should only be the start of working at heights safely. Following a well thought out plan, providing all the necessary resources, and training employees can help to prevent injuries and fatalities due to falls.