

THE IMPORTANCE OF FALL PROTECTION: WHAT EVERY EMPLOYER NEEDS TO KNOW

Introduction

- Falls remain one of the leading causes of serious workplace injuries and fatalities.
- Fall hazards exist in construction, manufacturing, warehousing, maintenance, roofing, and many other industries.
- OSHA requires employers to identify, assess, and control fall hazards before work begins.
- Many employers focus on fall protection equipment but overlook their responsibilities for planning, hazard assessment, and rescue procedures.

1. Risk Analysis: Identifying Fall Hazards Before Work Begins

Why Risk Analysis Matters

- Every fall protection program begins with a thorough hazard assessment.

Employers must identify:

- o Elevated work surfaces
- o Roof edges
- o Mezzanines
- o Loading docks
- o Openings and floor holes
- o Ladder and aerial lift operations



Key Questions

- How far could an employee fall?
- What obstacles exist below?
- What equipment will be used?
- Are employees properly trained?
- Is the work temporary or ongoing?

Employer Responsibility

- Conduct site-specific hazard assessments.
- Select appropriate fall protection methods.
- Ensure employees understand the hazards and controls.

2. Fall Prevention Plan: Preventing the Fall Before It Happens

What is a Fall Prevention Plan?

A written strategy outlining how fall hazards will be eliminated or controlled.

Elements of an Effective Plan

- Hazard identification
- Safe work procedures
- Designated competent person
- Employee training requirements
- Equipment inspection procedures
- Anchor point verification
- Documentation and periodic review

Required Hierarchy of Controls

1. Eliminate the fall hazard
2. Prevent the fall
3. Control (arrest) the fall

Your focus should be to preventing the fall.

OSHA Requirements

- OSHA's fall protection standards require employers to provide appropriate fall protection when employees are exposed to fall hazards.
- Certain situations require a site-specific fall protection plan prepared by a qualified person.

Common Employer Misconception

Many employers believe simply purchasing harnesses satisfies OSHA requirements.

In reality, OSHA expects employers to assess hazards, develop procedures, train workers, inspect equipment, and supervise implementation.

3. Fall Rescue Program: The Most Overlooked Requirement

Why Rescue Planning is Critical

- A harness stops a fall but does not complete the rescue.
- Suspension trauma can occur within minutes after a worker is left hanging.
- Emergency response planning must be established before work begins.

Key Questions

OSHA Requirements

OSHA requires employers to provide for prompt rescue of employees following a fall or ensure employees can rescue themselves. 29 CFR 1926.502(d)(20).

Components of a Rescue Program

- Rescue procedures
- Emergency contact information
- Designated rescue personnel
- Rescue equipment availability
- Rescue drills and training
- Post-incident reporting and investigation

Questions Every Employer Should Answer

- Who performs the rescue?
- How quickly can rescue occur?
- What equipment is needed?
- Has the rescue plan been practiced?
- Can emergency services access the location?

Common Employer Mistake

Many employers invest in harnesses and lanyards but have no documented rescue procedure. OSHA may consider this a serious deficiency because rescue planning is an essential part of a complete fall protection program.

Conclusion

The Three Pillars of Fall Protection

1. Risk Analysis – Identify and evaluate fall hazards.
2. Fall Prevention Plan – Implement controls to prevent falls.
3. Fall Rescue Program – Ensure prompt rescue if a fall occurs.

A fall protection program is much more than harnesses and lanyards. Employers have a legal responsibility to assess risks, establish prevention measures, train employees, and prepare for rescue. Understanding these responsibilities not only ensures OSHA compliance but also saves lives.

www.osha.gov/fall-protection