
ACCESSING SAFETY KNOWLEDGE (ASK) SHEET: INTRODUCTION TO OSHA'S FALL PROTECTION STANDARD

Fall hazards can be found on every construction site. Fall exposures exist whenever a worker's feet leave the ground. Some of the most common are ladders, scaffolds, lifts, and steel erection. OSHA addresses each of these in their own independent standard. One of the most recent additions to the OSHA standards was Subpart M 1926.500 to 1926.503 which defined a set of criteria for fall exposures not previously addressed in the standards listed above.

In its simplest form, the Fall Protection standard states that "employers must protect their employees from fall hazards and falling objects whenever and affected employee is 6 feet or more above a lower level. There are many hazards and remedies in the fall standard. The simplified outline below addresses the minimum requirements and applies to the majority of fall exposures most common to the construction industry.

- I. This standard applies whenever there is a possibility exists that a worker or an object can fall 6 feet or more from one level to lower level.
- II. Three most common fall exposures
 - A. Holes in the floor
 - B. Wall openings
 - C. Unprotected sides or edges
- III. Three most common remedies to fall hazards
 - A. Guardrails
 1. Must withstand a minimum 200lbs or force
 2. Top rail 42 inches high (plus or minus 3")
 3. Equipped with a toe board and mid-rail
 - B. Hole Covers
 1. Must support twice the intended load that may be imposed on it
 2. Must be secured to prevent displacement
 3. Must be color coded or clearly mark with the word "HOLE"
 4. Any hole 2" in diameter or more must be covered
 - C. Personal Fall Arrest Systems
 1. Full body harnesses only (can no longer use body belts)
 2. Maximum 6' free fall
 3. All equipment, harness, lanyards, dee-rings, snaphooks, etc, must have minimum tensile strength of 5,000lbs
 4. All anchorage points must support 5,000lbs per employee
 5. Anchorage points must allow enough distance to prevent the worker from hitting the lower level
- IV. Training
 - A. All employees, not just foremen, must be trained to recognize fall exposures
 - B. All employees must be trained on the remedies listed above

There are other exposures and remedies listed in the fall standard, but those listed above are the most common that we see on most construction sites. No matter who may be responsible for creating a fall exposure, it is very important to understand that we, as employers, are responsible for protecting our employees.

Provided by the ASA - Houston Chapter Safety Committee