



Safety

Fall Protection: 3 Tips for Tackling OSHA's Most Common Violation

Roland Jones | Jun 17, 2021

Fall protection has been the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's most frequently cited standard for a decade. What is it about the standard that yields so many violations? And what can be done to fix these recurring mistakes?

Earlier this year, "fall protection" earned a dubious distinction.

It topped the rankings for the 10th successive fiscal year in the *list of the 10 most frequently cited workplace safety violations for 2020*, which was issued by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

As OSHA noted in its report on the list, the organization publishes its annual top 10 to alert employers about the most commonly cited safety standards "so they can take steps to find and fix recognized hazards addressed in these and other standards," adding that "far too many preventable injuries and illnesses occur in the workplace."

In truth, much progress has been made in the field of workplace safety. Before OSHA was established in 1970 with a directive of protecting workers by requiring employers to mitigate or eliminate workplace hazards, fall protection in the workplace was unregulated and employers bore little responsibility for fall hazards, which were more commonplace.

"Why, then, does fall protection continue to top the safety violation charts, despite special emphasis from OSHA and the development of sophisticated fall protection equipment?"

The advent of OSHA brought in higher costs for litigation related to deaths and injuries from falls, changing attitudes toward workplace safety. As a result, in industries such as manufacturing and construction, safety became a greater priority. And technologies to protect workers—such as anchoring devices, lanyards and body harnesses—became more developed and commonplace.

Why, then, do fall protection violations continue to top the safety violation charts, despite special emphasis from OSHA and the development of sophisticated fall protection equipment? And what can

be done to mitigate the problem so that falls from heights do not remain a serious occupational safety problem?

Here are three areas of emphasis for employers who want to minimize fall-related injuries and deaths.

No. 1: Use Appropriate Fall Protection Equipment



Occupational fatalities caused by falls are a serious public health problem. There were 5,333 fatal work injuries recorded in the United States in 2019, up 2 percent from 2018, ***according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics***. The number of deaths due to falls, slips and trips increased 11 percent in 2019 to 880, accounting for the second-largest cause of fatalities after transportation incidents.

OSHA categorizes fall hazards into three groupings: falls on the same level, falls to lower levels, and slips and trips.

Each of these kinds of falls could be prevented by taking the appropriate fall protection measures: dealing with slippery, cluttered or unstable walking and working surfaces, and the use of guardrail systems, fall arrest systems and safety nets. Falls may also be caused by unsafely positioned ladders, poorly maintained equipment or a lack of effective training.

Personal fall arrest systems (PFAS) are an effective option for workers who are exposed to vertical drops of 6 feet or more. These PFAS, when used properly, are a vital safety device for workers. The key components of a PFAS are:

- A connecting device, which is a shock-absorbing lanyard that connects the body harness and the anchor point.
- The anchor point (or tie-off point), which is a secure point of attachment for a PFAS's lanyard.
- A full-body harness, which has shoulder and thigh straps and a D-ring at the back. It distributes

the force of a fall and cuts the chance of injury.

In addition to using a PFAS, companies should identify and evaluate the fall hazards in their workspaces and, if possible, make sure that employees receive fall-protection training and understand how to properly inspect and maintain safety equipment.

Read more: Workplace Fall Protection: How to Use a Safety Harness and Lanyard

No. 2: Identify and Evaluate Fall Hazards



A very important step in the drive toward reducing fall injuries is identifying the fall hazards in your workplace.

Employers must follow safety and health standards to protect their employees from workplace hazards. Part of this work is performing ***appropriate hazard assessments***. This should result in a written certification that includes the workplace evaluated, the name of the person completing the assessment and the date the assessment was completed.

Assessments will involve gathering data on all potential hazards to determine the probability and potential severity of each one, including gathering such information as the frequency of a performed task, the exposure time, the number of workers exposed, and the likelihood of falls.

Once these hazards and their risks are determined, they can then be evaluated and ranked in terms of priority. This information can then be used to create a fall protection program, which may include a budget, schedule and strategy for dealing with workplace fall risks.

OSHA recommends these actions to identify and assess hazards:

- Collect and review information about the hazards present or likely to be present in the workplace.

- Conduct initial and periodic inspections to identify new or recurring hazards.
- Investigate injuries, illnesses, incidents and close calls/near misses to determine the underlying hazards, their causes, and safety and health program shortcomings.
- Group similar incidents and identify trends in injuries, illnesses and hazards reported.
- Consider hazards associated with emergency or nonroutine situations.
- Determine the severity and likelihood of incidents that could result for each hazard identified and use this information to prioritize corrective actions.

Some hazards, such as housekeeping and tripping hazards, can and should be fixed as they are found, OSHA notes. "Fixing hazards on the spot emphasizes the importance of safety and health and takes advantage of a safety leadership opportunity."

By analyzing risks and placing them in a manageable and measurable plan, safety managers can highlight the most common and dangerous risks and focus on them, meaning managers receive the maximum risk reduction for their investment. And they can continuously track and monitor their efforts to reduce hazards against the amount of investment they made in safety programs.

Read more: Why You Need to Perform Workplace Hazard Assessments

No. 3: Provide Fall Protection Training and Education



While fall protection gains a lot of attention as OSHA's most frequent violation in the workplace, it's probably less noticed that No. 8 on the annual list is failure to provide adequate fall protection training for employees.

Poor understanding of the necessary procedures for fall protection is a contributing factor for equipment being misused or not used at all, leading to serious injury. Organizations should ensure the instructions provided with safety equipment are disseminated and understood, and assure proper

training is provided.

OSHA requires employers to provide a training program for employees who could be exposed to fall hazards in the workplace. Those programs should enable each employee to recognize the hazards of falling and the procedures to be followed in order to minimize these hazards.

A safety trainer should be a “competent person”—that is, the person should be able to identify the hazards at the work site, know how to eliminate or control the hazards and know how to train employees to protect themselves.

As OSHA ***notes***, education and training provides employers, managers, supervisors and workers with:

- Knowledge and skills needed to do their work safely and avoid creating hazards that could place themselves or others at risk.
- Awareness and understanding of workplace hazards and how to identify, report and control them.
- Specialized training when their work involves unique hazards.

“Effective training and education can be provided outside a formal classroom setting,” OSHA notes. “Peer-to-peer training, on-the-job training, and worksite demonstrations can be effective in conveying safety concepts, ensuring understanding of hazards and their controls, and promoting good work practices.”

What steps are you taking to reduce fall injuries and fatalities in your workplace? Share your thoughts in the comments below.

Click below to see MSC's fall protection checklist:

Fall Protection Checklist

Walking and Working Surfaces: Training Requirements (General Industry)

COMPLETED BY: _____

LOCATION: _____

DATE COMPLETED: _____

Please use below checklist to help identify potential hazards in your workplace with questions derived from Federal OSHA standards.

	Questions	OSHA Regulation	Yes	No	N/A
1	Has the employer provided the required training for each employee who may be exposed to a fall hazard?	1910.30(a)(1)			
2	Has each employee been trained by a qualified person?	1910.30(a)(2)			
3	Has each employee been trained on the nature of the fall hazards in the work area and how to recognize them?	1910.30(a)(3)(i)			
4	Has each employee been trained on the procedures to be followed to minimize those hazards?	1910.30(a)(3)(ii)			
5	Has each employee been trained on the correct procedures for installing, inspecting, operating, maintaining, and disassembling personal fall protection systems that they may be required to use?	1910.30(a)(3)(iii)			
6	Has each employee been trained on the correct use of personal fall protection systems and equipment including, but not limited to, proper hook-up, anchoring, and tie-off techniques, and methods of equipment inspection and storage?	1910.30(a)(3)(iv)			
7	Has each employee been trained in the proper care, inspection, storage, and use of the equipment before using the equipment?	1910.30(b)(1)			
8	Has each employee who uses a dockboard been trained to properly place and secure it to prevent unintentional movement?	1910.30(b)(2)			
9	Has each employee who uses a rope descent system been trained in proper rigging and use of the equipment?	1910.30(b)(3)			
10	Has each employee who uses a designated area been trained in the proper set-up and use of the area?	1910.30(b)(4)			
11	When there is reason to believe that an employee does not have the understanding and skill required, has retraining been conducted?	1910.30(c)			
12	When changes in the workplace render previous training obsolete or inadequate, has retraining been conducted?	1910.30(c)(1)			
13	When changes in the types of fall protection systems or equipment to be used render previous training obsolete or inadequate, has retraining been conducted?	1910.30(c)(2)			
14	When inadequacies in an affected employee's knowledge or use of fall protection systems or equipment indicate that the employee no longer has the requisite understanding or skill necessary to use equipment or perform the job safely, has retraining been conducted?	1910.30(c)(3)			
15	Has the employer provided information and training to each employee in a manner that the employee understands?	1910.30(d)			

1910.21 Scope and Definitions

Qualified describes a person who, by possession of a recognized degree, certificate, or professional standing, or who by extensive knowledge, training, and experience has successfully demonstrated the ability to solve or resolve problems relating to the subject matter, the work, or the project.

The information in this document is provided for general informational and educational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional or legal advice.

800.645.7270 | mscdirect.com



Fall Protection Checklist

www.mscdirect.com/betterMRO

Copyright ©2025 MSC Industrial Supply Co.