



Training

## 5 Must-Know Tips for Fall Protection Training

Julie Sullivan | Jan 04, 2018

### What You Need to Know:

After transportation-related fatalities, falls are the next most common area of worker deaths on the job. Recognizing this, OSHA has enacted (and is now enforcing) a policy that requires businesses to provide employees with adequate training for workplace falls—which several businesses do not have. There are multiple things to keep in mind when crafting a training program for workplace falls, but deciding what exactly the hazards are—and what kind of training is needed—is critical. Choosing the right trainer, keeping a detailed record and having frequent subsequent trainings are also key.

Workplace falls, which include slips and trip hazards, account for some of the highest injury and fatality rates. Now, OSHA is enforcing the law that requires businesses to implement fall protection training programs. How do you stay compliant?

Of all the workplace hazards that your employees encounter on a daily basis, slips, trips and falls are some of the most dangerous. After transportation-related fatalities, falls are the next most common area of worker deaths on the job. Take a look at the trend on falls over a five-year stretch:

“Fatal work injuries from falls, slips, or trips continued a general upward trend that began in 2011, increasing 6 percent to 849 in 2016 and 25 percent overall since 2011,” **notes** the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics, in its report “Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries Summary, 2016.”

Given those figures, it should come as little surprise that not just one—but *two*—of the most commonly cited workplace safety violations under this year’s OSHA Top 10 **list** surround falls: Fall Protection – General Requirements (1926.501) and Fall Protection – Training Requirements (1926.503). There were 6,887 **citations** for General Requirements and 1,724 for Training Requirements, respectively. Take note: The Fall Protection – Training Requirements rule is a fairly new addition to the Top 10 list. It’s the first time it has cracked the Top 10 most cited violations, but it made the 2016 OSHA list of top “serious violations” with 1,285 violations, per **Safety+Health Magazine**.

Workplace falls have been, and continue to be, a serious threat to staff. OSHA has been trying to help change that threat by adding on the fall protection training requirements rule as its own, separate violation.

As *EHS Today* emphasizes, OSHA passed a rule that went into effect Jan. 17, 2017, that would require businesses to specifically pinpoint areas susceptible to slip and fall hazards, in addition to providing adequate training requirements that outline what employees who may be subject to those hazards need to know before they are exposed (29 CFR 1910.30(a) (1)).

## What Do Workplace Falls Cost Companies?

Slips, trips and falls have a financial impact on companies. In 2014, for example, falls accounted for a whopping \$16.1 billion in the total cost of injuries, according to the 2017 Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index.

"The 10 leading causes of the most disabling work-related injuries account for \$49.9 billion, or 83.4 percent of the total cost of \$59.9 billion," writes Liberty Mutual Insurance in a *blog post*. "The top three causes—which collectively represent almost half of the cost of the leading accidents—are overexertion (\$13.8 billion, 23 percent), **falls on same level** (\$10.6 billion, 17.7 percent) and **falls to lower level** (\$5.5 billion, 9.2 percent)."

Of course, with a recently enacted regulation from OSHA, it would come as little surprise that there are many citations involving training requirements for workplace falls. But creating a robust training program isn't just a way to dodge *costly fines* and legal consequences from citations—it ultimately helps to save lives and reduce injuries.

Here, we outline five specific points that safety managers and business managers need to understand prior to embarking on a fall protection training program.

### 1. What Type of Fall Protection Training Do You Need?

Just as no two companies produce the same type of product, no two workplaces are associated with the same types of hazards. There are four distinct levels of training that depend on experience or level: awareness, authorized-user, competent person and qualified-person training, finds Marty Breimhurst, a fall protection training manager at 3M, in an *OHS Online* article.

Awareness training typically involves briefer reviews of hazards and equipment, but lacks a hands-on touch—most likely because employees aren't working with the equipment themselves, suggests Breimhurst. Alternatively, authorized-user training is a bit more intensive, with employees exposed to training that is specific to their unique job. Competent-person training typically involves a supervisor or manager who is responsible for other workers misusing equipment or being exposed to potentially deadly areas. Finally, with qualified-person training, an individual will already have a specialized degree or training that allows him or her to address specific situations and design safety programs themselves.

Chances are your shop will require some, if not all, of these types of training.

### 2. Identify and Eliminate Fall and Trip Hazards Ahead of Time

Aside from identifying who exactly needs to be trained, you'll also need to identify *what* exactly those individuals will be trained on—and to see if any hazards can potentially be eliminated in the meantime.

Safety managers should begin by enlisting the help of an engineer to identify known hazards before relying solely on modifications after an employee has identified it as a danger, finds Melissa Black, an

adjunct professor in occupational safety and health sciences at Columbia Southern University who is also a Certified Safety Professional and Certified Industrial Hygienist, *in an article* for EHS Today. If that hazard can't be eliminated entirely (whether that's an exposed cord on the floor, flimsy ladder or boots without proper traction), bring attention to it by a) clearly identifying it, and b) incorporating it (along with other hazards) into the foundation of your training program.

"Pay attention to visual delineation for change of surface, transition areas, lighting (color, contrasts, shadows, intensity, etc.) and assure all are appropriate for use and the environment," explains Black. "Ramps, rails, slip-resistant floors and coefficient of friction are all considerations to decrease fall risks."

## Select the Right PPE: Fall Protection

Need help selecting the right PPE for your specific fall protection situation? Take a look at the variety of: anchorage connectors, fall protection kits, harnesses and belts, lanyards, lifelines, fall limiters, and horizontal and vertical systems, at *MSC Direct*.

And if you're looking for matting, either for anti-fatigue or entrance matting, find what you need for a safe environment with our super handy *interactive selector*.

### 3. Choose the Proper Fall Protection Trainer and Fall Training Program

After you've identified the fall hazards present in your workplace and the types of employees that require training, you'll need to select the proper teacher—which will vary by the *state or region*. The National Safety Council offers *on-site and online training programs* for fall protection, but finding the proper training program through word-of-mouth is likely to be your best bet.

Try to optimize the classes for maximum effectiveness. As a rule of thumb, classes should be hands-on, conducted on-site and with a low student-to-instructor ratio, advises Breimhurst.

### 4. Document Your Slips, Trips and Falls: Keep Track of Everything

Although forward-thinking, preventive training programs are key in keeping your staff safe from workplace falls, they also help ensure that history doesn't repeat itself.

OSHA already *requires* that employers with more than 10 employees keep a record of serious work-related injuries and illnesses, as a blog from the *Economic Policy Institute* explains. Keeping thorough, detailed records is a surefire way to encourage employers to pay closer attention to unsafe practices and more quickly identify ways to rectify them. As Breimhurst points out, record-keeping is also a great way to keep your own organization and brand safe, especially in situations where courts require that you outline the type of training an individual received prior to an incident.

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Melissa Black

Adjunct Professor, Occupational Safety and Health Sciences, Columbia Southern University

## **5. Finalize the Frequency of Fall Protection Training**

**OSHA** considers employees "trained" after they've completed an initial program, however the **ANSI/ASSE Z359** standard recommends that employees be trained every two years—especially when that training is in regard to workplace falls. While the frequency of training for your staff is entirely up to your judgment, erring on the side of caution—and continuing safety education for your staff—is likely to be your best bet. After all, they are your greatest asset.

"Workers help generate fiscal success for businesses, yet they must be safe," explains Black. "It is the job of safety professionals to protect workers, which ensures production doesn't slow down and decreases disability costs."

*Has your shop implemented a workplace fall protection training program yet? Let us know in the comment section below.*

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