



FALL SAFETY AND SMALL BUSINESS

People need fall arrest equipment protection because even those with experience working at heights can lose their balance or grip; we can slip, trip, or misstep at any time. People may think that their reflexes will protect them, but they're falling before they know it, and they don't have to fall far to be seriously injured. People have been falling since Day One. Until people get better at landing, they will need protection from falling.

Falls from ladders, roofs, and scaffolds account for more than half of all disabling falls to lower levels. Disabling falls from ladders, roofs, and scaffolds are most frequent within the construction trades. The cause of such falls? Loss of balance caused by slipping, tripping, and shifting or unstable ladders.

Fall-protection equipment is the first thing that comes to mind in protecting against fall potential: personal fall-arrest systems, safety nets, or guardrails, for example. But fall protection means more than equipment. Fall protection is what people do to eliminate fall hazards, to prevent falls, and to ensure that workers who may fall aren't injured.

Accomplished fall protection is done by the following:

Make fall protection part of your workplace safety and health program.

Identify and evaluate fall hazards.

Eliminate fall hazards, if possible.

Train workers to recognize fall hazards.

Use appropriate equipment to prevent falls and to protect workers if they do fall.

Inspect and maintain fall-protection equipment before and after using it.

Roles of personnel involved in assuring fall protection is effective:

For Employers. Identify fall hazards at the site. Eliminate the hazards, prevent falls from occurring, or ensure that if falls occur, employees aren't injured. Make sure that employees follow safe practices and are trained to recognize fall hazards.

For Employees. Follow safe work practices, use equipment properly, and participate in training. Learn to recognize unsafe practices, know the tasks that increase the risk of falling, and understand how to control exposure to fall hazards.

For Architects and engineers. Educate employers about hazards that could expose workers to falls during each phase of the project. When designing buildings and structures, consider fall protection and other safety needs of those who will do the construction work.

For Building owners and managers. Ensure that those who do exterior construction or maintenance work know how to protect themselves from falls, are aware of installed anchorages, and know how to use their fall-protection equipment.

For Equipment manufacturers. Ensure that fall-protection equipment meets federal safety requirements and protects workers when they use it properly. Warn workers through instruction manuals and on equipment labels about the danger of using equipment improperly.

For Lawyers. Review your client's construction bids to ensure that they comply with local and national requirements. The documents should clearly state the client's responsibilities for protecting workers from falls and for identifying and controlling hazards that cause falls.

For further assistance in fall arrest equipment or other safety issues contact the author.

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