



Fall Protection *not just about keeping workers from falling*

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What do you think when you hear fall protection? More than likely the first thing that we think about is donning a harness and a connecting device to a tie off point to protect us from a dangerous fall. Did you also consider the hazards from falling objects? If you did, excellent! Often, we forget about items like tools, material and debris that could fall from above and could strike an unsuspecting worker or pedestrian with vicious force. Mitigating the danger of falling objects should be taken as seriously as personal fall protection.

There are many solutions that can drastically reduce the dangers of falling objects on the jobsite.

- You should wear your hard hat at all times on any construction site! It is the best way to protect yourself from head injuries. If you do not wear it, only your skull and your hair are protecting you from falling objects, electrocution, that low-hanging pipe, and the two-by-six that your co-worker is carrying over his shoulder. Employers must provide hard hats and ensure that employees wear protective coverings when objects or debris might fall from above and strike workers on the head. Hard hats must be replaced if they show signs of damage (dents, cracks, penetration, or fatigue due to rough treatment). It is essential to inspect hard hats for damage and signs of fatigue each time they are used. Additionally, keep your hardhat from falling off or blowing off and becoming a falling object by using a hard hat tether.
- Tools are prevalent on the jobsite and are extremely dangerous when they fall. In fact, there was a recent documented fatality that involved a falling tape measure, though small, the force generated from the fall became lethal. The use of a tool lanyard could have prevented this tragedy. Tool lanyards are available for a variety of tools from small and lightweight like a screwdriver to heavier tools like a cordless drill. Make sure your tool lanyard is rated for the tool you are tethering.
- There are solutions for preventing material, debris and other objects from getting blown off or kicked off a deck or a scaffold from higher working levels of a jobsite as well. Toe boards and cables could prevent items from sliding off work surfaces. However traditional toe boards and cables do very little to prevent debris from falling. A better solution, would be the use of vertical netting. When properly installed, the netting meets the OSHA requirement for toe board and mid-rail protection. When vertical netting is installed correctly it will act as a wind barrier, reducing the occurrence of wind blown objects. Looking up and seeing the brightly colored nets help assure you that you are on a jobsite that has taken precautions to protect you from falling objects.

- It is also important to reduce or eliminate personnel and pedestrians from zones where there is hazard of falling objects. Covered pedestrian walkways are always a great solution. As to the other areas that are susceptible to the dangers of falling objects, it always helps to clearly mark these areas with proper signage and surrounding hazard areas with caution/danger tape, safety flagging or barricades. These visual aids will alert personnel to the areas where there is increased danger of potential falling objects.
- To avoid dropping items when climbing a ladder, abide by all ladder safety rules. When climbing a ladder never carry items in your hands. Instead, use material baskets, hoists or a hand line when moving tools and materials to other elevations. Be sure to secure any items that can fall off of you while climbing a ladder.

In this time of building it higher, there is comfort in knowing that the likelihood of being struck by a falling object is lower. Responsible contractors are now more equipped with this knowledge and access to all the items discussed in this article, making the construction site even more safe environment for everyone in proximity.

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