



Fall protection basics

By Gina Lego

Anyone who routinely works at elevations is susceptible to sustaining serious injuries – even death – as a result of inadequate or missing fall protection. For workers on an unguarded platform more than 3 m (10 ft.) from the ground to those constructing high-rise buildings, proper fall protection is an important issue and mandatory under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation.

The Regulation is clear: fall protection must be used whenever a worker is at risk of falling 3 m or more. In addition, before workers begin a job, they must be thoroughly trained in the proper use of the fall protection system they will be using.

Hierarchy of fall protection

The hierarchy of fall protection demands certain steps be taken to protect workers from injury as a result of a fall from an elevation of 3 m or more:

1. **Adequate guard or handrails** – Permanent or temporary, these form a protective barrier around an opening or edge to prevent a fall to a lower level.
2. **Fall restraint** – A system in which you are attached to a fixed-length line that prevents you from travelling too close to an opening or roof edge.
3. **Fall arrest system** – A system (including a lanyard or lifeline, a harness or belt, and, most importantly, an anchor) that protects you after you fall by stopping you from hitting the surface below.

4. **Work procedures** – Safe procedures, such as the Control Zone and Safety Monitor System, can minimize the risk of falling.

When workers are at risk of falling from an elevation in excess of 7.5 m (25 ft.), the employer must have a written fall protection plan in place and available at the workplace before work with a risk of falling begins.

Unfortunately, some employers overlook preventive steps and many are penalized for lack of fall protection, particularly in the roofing industry. Responsibility also rests with the worker, who must use the fall protection equipment and inspect it to ensure it is in good working order.

Remember, the best fall protection is fall prevention.

Resources for fall protection

Visit the WCB's Health and Safety Centre at www.worksafebc.com for fall protection resources, including the booklet *An Introduction to Personal Fall Protection Equipment, Safety Belts, Harnesses, Lanyards, and Life-*

lines and “Amendments to the Fall Protection Requirements of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation (B.C. Reg. 420/2004, as amended).”

For more information, talk to your prevention officer or call the WorkSafe Call Centre at 604 276-3100, toll-free in B.C. at 1 888 621-SAFE (7233).

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