

FALL PROTECTION

Falls from elevations are the leading cause of death in general industry workplaces. They can happen in all occupations and in a variety of work settings — from the employee washing windows 40 feet from the ground to the stock clerk retrieving goods from a shelf using a ladder. Thankfully, these types of falls can be prevented by using proper fall protection.

Fall protection is any equipment, device, or system that prevents a worker from falling from an elevation or mitigates the effect of such a fall.

Your employer must provide you with fall protection if you are assigned a job that exposes you to a fall hazard four feet or more above a lower level. Fall protection must also be provided regardless of height in certain situations, such as working above dangerous equipment. The types of fall protection you may use include:

- Covers,
- Designated areas,
- Guardrails,
- Handrails,
- Personal fall protection,
- Ladder safety system, and
- Safety nets.

If you use one of these fall protection systems, you must be trained.

Where Are the Regulations?

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has rules governing fall protection. These rules are found at 29 CFR 1910.29, .30, and .140. This requires your employer to:

- Provide you with fall protection if you are exposed to fall hazards;

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All of these guardrail requirements are intended to provide adequate fall protection.

Handrails

Handrails are also a type of fall protection. A handrail is a rail used to provide you with a handhold for support. They must be used as fall protection on flights of stairs having at least three treads and at least four risers. These requirements are dependent upon stairway width and the number of enclosed sides.

Personal Fall Protection

Another type of fall protection is personal fall protection. This is protection that is worn on your body. This may be familiar to you already, but OSHA says this includes three types:

1. Personal fall arrest,
2. Travel restraint, and
3. Positioning devices.

Personal Fall Arrest

Personal fall arrest is a system that arrests you in a fall. This means that the system stops you before hitting the floor, ground, etc. This fall protection consists of a:

- Body harness,
- Anchorage, and
- Connector.

The body harness is made of straps that are worn in a manner that distributes fall arrest forces over your thighs, pelvis, waist, chest, and shoulders should a fall occur. It's critical that the harness is worn correctly and securely to prevent you from falling out of it during a fall. It also helps support your body in midair after a fall.

