

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: Basic Scaffold Safety – OSHA Fall Protection Rules for Scaffolding

[Reference 1910 Subpart D / 1926 Subpart L]

Working on top of a scaffold presents many potential hazards, including falling to a lower level. So in today's toolbox talk we will concentrate on understanding a few of the major requirements for the use of guardrails and fall protection systems when we work on different types of scaffolding:

- Federal OSHA requires that each employee working on a scaffold platform located more than 10 feet above a lower level shall be protected from falls by guardrails or a fall arrest system, except those on single-point and two-point adjustable suspension scaffolds *(also address your state OSHA/company/jobsite rules here if the threshold requiring fall protection on scaffolding is different than Federal OSHA)*. Each employee on a single-point and two-point adjustable suspended scaffold shall be protected by both a personal fall arrest system and a guardrail. Each employee on a boatswains' chair, catenary scaffold, float scaffold, needle beam scaffold, or ladder jack scaffold shall be protected by a personal fall arrest system. And each employee on a self-contained adjustable scaffold shall be protected by a guardrail system when the platform is supported by the frame structure, and by both a personal fall arrest system and a guardrail when the platform is supported by ropes;
- When guardrail systems are utilized, they must be installed along all open sides and ends of platforms. No guardrail is required on a side or edge of any work platform that is no more than 14 inches from the face of the work for most operations, and no more than 18 inches for plastering and lathing operations. If these distances are exceeded, fall protection must be provided;
- The height of the top-rail for scaffolds must be between 38 inches and 45 inches above the work platform. The mid-rail shall be installed at a height approximately midway between the top edge of the guardrail system and the platform surface. When the cross-point of cross-bracing (also known as x-bracing) is located between 38 inches and 48 inches above the work platform, it can be used as the top-rail of a guardrail system as long as the end connections are no more than 48 inches apart vertically. And when the cross-point of cross-bracing falls between 20 inches and 30 inches above the work platform, it may be used as the mid-rail of a guardrail system, as long as the end connections are no more than 48 inches apart vertically;
- When vertical lifelines are used, they shall be fastened to a fixed safe point of anchorage, shall be independent of the scaffold, and shall be protected from sharp edges and abrasion. Safe points of anchorage include structural members of buildings, but do not include standpipes, vents, other piping systems, electrical conduit, outrigger beams, or counterweights. Vertical lifelines, independent support lines, and suspension ropes shall not be attached to each other, nor shall they be attached to or use the same point of anchorage, nor shall they be attached to the same point on the scaffold or personal fall arrest system;
- When horizontal lifelines are used, they shall be secured to two or more structural members of the scaffold, or they may be looped around both suspension and independent suspension lines (on scaffolds so equipped) above the hoist and brake attached to the end of the scaffold. Horizontal lifelines shall not be attached only to the suspension ropes.

If you are ever in doubt about when or how to prevent falling from a scaffold platform, check with the Competent Person for further guidance. Does anyone have any questions about these basic OSHA fall protection requirements for scaffold platforms? Thank you for your participation. Please make sure to sign your name on the training certification form so you get credit for attending today's training session.