

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: Fall Prevention – Important Warnings About Guardrails

[Reference 1910 Subpart D / 1926 Subpart M]

The purpose of this discussion is **NOT** to tell you how to construct a wooden or wire rope guardrail for fall prevention purposes. The assumption is, if you are building a wooden or wire rope guardrail to prevent falls, you've already been schooled on the specifications for how they are to be constructed, and are authorized by the company to build them; otherwise, don't do it! Instead, this talk is for everyone else, to discuss some important information about wooden and wire rope guardrails that you need to know to help prevent injuring yourself or others.

It is of utmost importance to understand that the specifications for wooden and wire rope guardrails such as those built at many industrial and construction sites are NOT as protective as the specification for guardrails built for a commercial or retail environment, where the general public will use them. For example, Federal OSHA safety specifications for guardrails built from wood or wire rope at industrial and construction sites only requires the top rails to support a minimum of 200 pounds of force applied in any direction. That is NOT a lot of force. Even if you weigh less than 200 pounds, your body can generate much more force than that if you happened to trip or fall against, or onto, the guardrail. Also, the Federal OSHA spec's for a mid-rail only requires that it support a minimum force of 150 pounds; and the mid-rail can be spaced to where the distance between the top and mid-rail could range up to, but not more than, 19 inches apart.

So, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that a top rail or mid-rail might not support your weight if you happened to climb on top of it, or fall into it, or lean through it. And it is also a distinct possibility that you could actually fall between the top and mid-rails if you lean too far between the rails to reach through. In reality, guardrails built for industrial installations, as well as those built for temporary protection on construction sites, should be thought of as "perimeter indicators"; there so you can see the edge of the work surface or platform, and to nudge you if you inadvertently get too close to the edge. With that in mind, please remember that you must:

- Never lean over a guardrail
- Never lean against a guardrail
- Never climb onto a guardrail
- Never tie a rope onto a guardrail
- Never connect your safety lanyard to a guardrail

Respect the fact that wooden and wire rope guardrails installed on industrial work platforms, and at construction sites for temporary protection, are not there to guarantee you cannot fall over the edge. Instead, they are there to remind you to be cautious when getting near the edge.

Does anyone have any questions or comments about today's toolbox talk about guardrails? Thank you for your participation today. Please take time to sign your name on the training certification form so you will get credit for attending today's toolbox training session.