

Fall Protection

In this fall protection toolbox talk, learn the common causes of falls on construction sites, fall prevention tips, and basic ladder safety.

Fall Protection

Every year, falls are one of the leading causes of serious workplace injuries and fatalities in construction.

A fall can happen at any time, whether you're climbing a ladder, working on scaffolding, or simply walking from one work area to another. Injuries from falls can range in severity from bruises and swelling to head injuries, broken bones, and lacerations.

Causes of falls in the workplace

Many different factors can lead to a fall, and the risk of falling is always present on the jobsite. It is important to try to understand the main causes of falls to help prevent them.

While occasionally falling is an unavoidable accident with no real cause, falls are often caused by unsafe working conditions or unsafe acts.

Unsafe conditions

[Unsafe conditions in the workplace](#) increase the risk of all accidents, including falls. Some examples of unsafe conditions include:

- Slippery, cluttered, or unstable walking or working surfaces
- Unprotected edges
- Floor holes and wall openings
- Unsafely positioned ladders
- Misused fall protection
- Improper guardrails
- Damaged equipment (ladders, stairs, etc.)
- Unmarked elevation changes
- Wet or slippery floors

Unsafe acts

Sometimes falls happen because of the [unsafe actions](#) of employees. These include:

- Working at heights without fall protection
- Improper use of ladders
- Leaning over guardrail
- Lack of awareness

Fall protection best practices

A qualified employee should conduct a [risk assessment](#) in all work areas to identify hazards. Once hazards are identified, you can take proper steps to help reduce the risk of accidents.

You can also reduce potential hazards that lead to slips, trips, and falls by proactively managing your workplace environment and closely monitoring work as it is completed to help lower the risk of falls.

1. Walking surfaces

Keep walking surfaces clean and free of clutter. If you keep walkways clear, you can quickly and easily reduce the potential for injury.

Unobstructed pathways minimize the chance of anyone tripping over an unexpected object and reduce hazards that can lead to [a fall or slip](#).

2. Stairways and handrails

Stairs are a common area for falls in a workplace and sometimes additional care is needed to reduce the risk here. Make sure stairways are well lit, clear of objects and debris, and free of unsecured objects at all times.

Do not run or jump on the stairs and only take one stair at a time. Always use handrails when climbing or walking downstairs.

3. Manage cords

Between [extension cords](#), power cords, internet cords, phone cords, machine cords, and every other type of cord, cords can create a sea of obstacles.

Try to keep cords out of sight and behind walls or furniture. Never have cords running across a walkway.

4. Footwear

Make sure you are wearing the proper footwear for the job you are performing. Open-toe shoes should never be worn on the jobsite. Shoes should have the proper traction and be slip-resistant.

5. Lighting

Proper lighting inside and outside of your work area should always be used. Never try walking in the dark. Steps and tripping hazards can be hidden if a room is dark or has a shadow this is why lighting is important.

6. Signage

If you know of a potential risk that could lead to a fall but that cannot be immediately fixed, try to make sure there is adequate signage there. A sign indicating a step, a gap, uneven ground, or even loose rocks will call attention to the area and let others know to be more attentive. If you know the floor is wet, a wet floor sign can help others from potentially falling.

If you see an area that needs signage, please alert your supervisor.

7. Ladders and step stools

Use ladders and step stools with caution. Get someone to hold the bottom of the ladder when you are climbing. Never stand in a chair or on a desk or table to reach something.

8. Check floors

When you are walking, make sure you pay attention to your surroundings, including the ground. If you see a crack or a hole, try to avoid this area. Point these areas out to your supervisor so they can look into getting them fixed.

9. Clean up spills

If you spill something, clean it up immediately. Do not leave a spill for someone else to deal with. When a spill occurs, immediately place a hazard sign near the spill and get to work cleaning it up properly.

Ladder safety

Employees should follow certain safety rules when using ladders. Whether they are climbing up the ladder or climbing down, the same [ladder safety](#) rules apply.:

- Hold onto the ladder with both hands. If you need to take materials up or down, do so using a rope or a different system.
- Always face the ladder when going up or down.
- Never slide down a ladder.
- Be sure your shoes are clean of mud and grease and are not slippery.
- Do not climb higher than the third rung from the top of the ladder.
- Carry tools on a tool belt and not in your hands.
- Use a 4 to 1 ratio when leaning a single or extension ladder.
- [Inspect the ladder](#) for defects before using it.
- Never use a defective ladder.
- Never splice or lash a short ladder together.
- Never use makeshift ladders.
- Make sure the ladder is fully open when in use.
- Keep ladders clean from dirt and grease.
- Never use a ladder during [strong and high winds](#).
- Never jump from a ladder.

Fall prevention is your best protection

Remember that most falls can be prevented. Falls often occur due to someone being careless or clumsy. It is critical to pay attention to what you are doing and to regularly survey your work area for potential hazards.

If you see a hazard that needs attention, let a supervisor know immediately. You should also let your supervisor know if you slip, trip, or fall at work, no matter how small you think your injury is.