

Prevent falls on construction projects

Safe At Work Ontario
 Enforcement > Compliance > Partnership >



The Ministry of Labour is increasing enforcement of regulations and promoting awareness of essential safety measures to improve the safety of workers on construction sites.

Preventing falls

Guardrail systems – rather than fall arrest systems – are the preferred way to prevent falls, wherever possible. Constructors and employers should, where reasonably possible, install guardrails as per section 26.1 (1) of the Construction Projects Regulation, O. Reg. 213/91 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA).

Workers must be protected where reasonably possible by a guardrail system that meets regulated requirements when they are at risk of:

- falling more than 3 metres (10 feet)
- falling more than 1.2 metres (4 feet), if the work area is used as a path for a wheelbarrow or similar equipment
- falling into operating machinery
- falling into water or another liquid
- falling into or onto a hazardous substance or object
- falling through an opening on a work surface

A guardrail system meeting regulated requirements must be used if a worker is exposed to a fall of 2.4 metres (8 feet) or more where the worker has access to the perimeter or an open side of:

- a floor, including the floor of a mezzanine or balcony
- the surface of a bridge
- a roof while formwork is in place
- a scaffold platform or other work platform, runway, or ramp

Protecting workers

Where it is not reasonably possible to protect the workers from falls by guardrails or by travel restraint systems, they must be protected by at least one of the following:

- a fall restricting system designed to limit a worker's free fall to 0.6 metres (2 feet),
- a safety net designed, tested and installed as per ANSI standard,
- a fall arrest system, which must:
 - include a CSA-approved full body harness,
 - include a lanyard equipped with a shock absorber (unless using the shock absorber could cause a falling worker to hit the ground or an object or level below the work),
 - be attached by a lifeline or by the lanyard to an adequate, independent fixed support, and
 - limit a falling worker to a peak fall-arrest force not greater than 8 kilonewtons (1800 pounds force).

In the event of a fall, these systems must keep a worker from hitting the ground, the next level below, or any other objects below the work.

Workers must be adequately trained and given instruction about the proper use of the fall protection system by a “competent person.”

A competent person is qualified – through knowledge, training and experience – to organize the work and its performance, to be familiar with the act and the regulations that apply to the work being performed, and to know about any actual or potential danger to health and safety in the workplace.

An employer who is covered by the OHSA has obligations under the act, including:

- instruct, inform and supervise workers to protect their health and safety [clause 25(2)(a)]
- appoint competent persons as supervisors [clause 25(2)(c)]
- take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker [clause 25(2)(h)], and
- post a copy of the occupational health and safety policy in the workplace, where workers will be most likely to see it [clause 25(2)(k)].

An employer with six or more employees must **also**:

- prepare an occupational health and safety policy, review that policy at least once a year and set up a program to implement it [clause 25(2)(j)].

Supervisors

The OHSA sets out certain specific duties for workplace supervisors. A supervisor must:

- ensure workers work in compliance with the protective devices, measures and procedures required by the OHSA and regulations [clause 27(1)(a)]
- ensure workers use or wear any equipment, protective device or clothing required by the employer is used or worn by workers [clause 27(1)(b)]
- advise workers of any potential or actual health or safety dangers known by the supervisor [clause 27(2)(a)]
- if prescribed, provide workers with written instructions about the measures and procedures to be taken for the workers' protection [clause 27(2)(b)], and
- take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of workers [clause 27(2)(c)].

More information about safety on construction sites

- Ministry of Labour, construction safety: <http://www.ontario.ca/ConstructionSafety>
- Infrastructure Health & Safety Association: <http://www.csa.org/home.cfm>
- Workplace Safety & Insurance Board: <http://www.wsib.on.ca/>
- View CSA standards referenced in occupational health and safety legislation: <http://ohsviewaccess.csa.ca/default.asp?lang=EN>

Anyone can report unsafe work practices to the Ontario Ministry of Labour: 1-877-202-0008.

This Fact Sheet has been prepared to assist workplace parties in understanding their obligations under the OHSA and the regulations. Reference should always be made to the official version of the legislation. For complete information, please refer to the Occupational Health and Safety Act:

http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90o01_e.htm