

Spot The Safety Violation: Don't Fall for This



What could happen if a worker fell through this opening? What measures should be in place to prevent such falls?



Yes, falls from heights such as roofs or scaffolding is one of the most common and dangerous safety hazards. But workers can also get injured if they fall through an opening in a floor or wall.

This picture shows a large opening in the floor of a building under construction. There are no guardrails or other safety measures to prevent a worker from falling through this opening. And the plank placed across it actively encourages workers to unsafely cross over it. Although it's unclear how far a worker would fall should he tumble through this opening, it seems likely he'd at least get injured if not killed.

Protecting Workers from Falls Through Openings

Every jurisdiction's OHS regulations require employers to protect workers from falls through openings. Although their requirements may vary, you should generally take these steps:

Step #1: Identify hazardous openings. Identify any openings in floors, roofs, walls, work platforms, etc. that are big enough that a worker could fall all or partly through them. The opening in this picture is a good example of such an opening.

Step #2: Install either guardrails or coverings. Guardrails are generally the preferred method of preventing falls through openings. The OHS regulations usually include detailed requirements for guardrails around openings, often depending on the type of material the guardrail is made of, such as wood or wire rope.

If you can't use a guardrail around an opening, you must cover it. Covers should

generally be:

- Big enough to cover the whole opening;
- Securely fastened to prevent workers from easily removing them;
- Strong enough to bear weight; and
- Marked as covering an opening.

Step #3: Develop a hazardous openings policy. Create and implement a policy on hazardous openings. This policy should cover, at a minimum:

- Identification of hazardous openings;
- Determining the type of protection to be used for such openings;
- Requirements for guardrails and covers; and
- Procedures to be used when an opening's protection must be removed.

Step #4: Train workers. As with all safety policies, you should train workers on your hazardous openings policy, covering:

- General safe work procedures for working around openings;
- Installation and use of guardrails and covers; and
- Procedures to follow when a guardrail or covering must be removed.

Also, ensure that workers wear appropriate fall protection when working around or near hazardous openings.