

Spot The Safety Violation: Party Decorations Make Bad Safety Measures



Are these festive banners appropriate guarding around this worksite hole in the ground'



At many worksites, workers are at risk of falling from heights, such as scaffolding or roofs. And at nearly all workplaces, workers are at risk of slipping or tripping and falling on the same level, such as over a cord or due to a puddle of water. But in some workplaces, workers may also be at risk of falling through holes or openings in floors.

This picture from elcosh shows a large hole that's 'guarded' by banners more suitable for decorating at a child's birthday party than for serving as a safety measure. The banners do nothing to keep workers or pedestrians from falling into the opening. And they don't adequately warn people of the presence of a hazardous opening. Even using yellow caution tape'although also not a proper guardrail'would be better than these banners!

4 Steps to Preventing Falls Through Openings

Across Canada, the OHS regulations require employers to protect workers from falls through openings. To comply with the regulations, take these general steps:

Step #1: Identify hazardous openings. First, identify any openings in floors, roofs, walls, work platforms, etc. through which workers could fall. The requirements typically apply only to openings big enough that a worker could fall all or partly through them. The opening shown in this picture is clearly big enough to fit a worker, such as the one peering into it. Thus, this hazardous opening would be covered by these requirements.

Step #2: Install either guardrails or coverings. The two basic safeguards for openings are guardrails and covers. Guardrails are the preferred method of preventing falls through openings because they're more obvious and visible than covers and are harder to remove. The OHS regulations usually spell out detailed requirements for guardrails around openings, which may depend on the type of material the guardrail is made of, such as wood or wire rope. But in no jurisdiction would party decorations qualify as a compliant guardrail.

If you can't use a guardrail around an opening, you must cover it. The OHS laws typically require covers to 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 that covers, 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 always, 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.

Warn Workers of Confined Spaces

In addition to being a hazardous opening, it appears that the hole in the picture is the entrance to a confined space. But there's no sign, placard, etc.

to warn workers and others of the presence of a confined space and its hazards, and to bar unauthorized individuals from entering it. And the OHS regulations may require such safety measures.

For example, Sec. 17 of Ontario's *Confined Spaces Regulation* says that if there's a possibility of unauthorized entry into a confined space, the employer or constructor must ensure that each entrance to the confined space:

- Is adequately secured against unauthorized entry; or
- Has been provided with adequate barricades, adequate warning signs regarding unauthorized entry or both.

For more information, tools and other resources to help you protect workers who must work in or near confined spaces and comply with the OHS laws, go to the OHS Insider's Confined Space Compliance Centre.