

Spot The Safety Violation: Protect Workers from Falls from Heights



These workers are working at this construction site without what key safety measures in place'



Falls from heights is one of the most common and serious type of safety incident, especially in the construction industry. Workers involved in such falls often suffer serious injuries, such as paralysis, or are killed. That's why the OHS laws require the use of appropriate fall protection, such as guardrails and fall arrest harnesses, when workers are working at certain elevations.

This picture from the Health and Safety Executive, Great Britain's OHS regulator, shows several individuals on the roof of a hotel construction project without adequate fall protection in place. What's worse is that two of these individuals are directors of the roofing company and so should be setting a good safety example for their workers.

A member of the public witnessed and photographed this unsafe work and contacted the HSE. That individual saw one of the directors walking along a beam to pass something to the other director and then walking back again. There was nothing in place to prevent or mitigate a fall from this beam, which would've been one storey and onto timber beams.

The HSE investigation found that the roofing company and its directors chose to rush the job in order to submit their invoice earlier. The company and both directors pleaded guilty to fall protection violations and were fined.

After the case, the HSE inspector said that the roofing company 'had a duty to protect any employees, even the directors, from a risk of a fall from height' Mr. Clarke and Mr. Hepworth in their position as directors recognised that their choices on that day placed themselves at a serious risk of death or life changing injury and admitted as much for themselves and their company. They only realised afterwards that running those risks in order to submit an invoice early was a very unnecessary, considering how serious the consequences could have been. It is pure luck that no one was injured or killed.'

PROTECTING WORKERS FROM FALLS FROM HEIGHTS

The OHS law across Canada requires employers to protect workers from hazardous falls. The law often specifies which type of fall protection equipment should be used in which circumstances. But even in jurisdictions without a [hierarchy of fall protection equipment](#) in their OHS laws, guidelines will often suggest an order of preference for fall protection equipment, which usually follows this hierarchy:

- Top preference: guardrails and similar barriers
- Fall or travel restraint systems, which prevent workers from falling
- Fall arrest systems, which don't prevent a worker from falling but stop his descent before he hits the surface below
- Last preference: safe work procedures.

You can use [this form](#) to assess the fall hazards posed by work at heights and ensure that the proper fall protection equipment is used to protect workers from these hazards.

Also, ensure that workers' fall prevention or arrest equipment is inspected before use by a [competent person](#) for safety issues such as worn or damaged straps, buckles, D-rings or lines. (Use this [fall protection equipment inspection checklist](#) or this [safety harness checklist](#).)

In addition to using appropriate fall protection equipment, you should also implement a [fall protection plan](#) that covers the following:

1. The fall hazards at the workplace;
2. The fall protection equipment to be used;
3. The anchors to be used;
4. The procedures to be used to assemble, maintain, inspect, use and disassemble the fall protection systems;
5. Confirmation that the clearance distances below the work area are sufficient to prevent a worker from hitting the ground or an object or level below the work area, if applicable; and
6. The rescue procedures to be used in an emergency.

Your fall protection plan should be in writing and available at the worksite to which it applies. (Use this [Fall Protection Plan Template](#) to develop your plans.) And you should train workers on the plan.