



# BIE SAFETY ADVISOR

## Join OSHA's National Safety Stand-Down to Prevent Falls in Construction

The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration recently announced that it has scheduled the 8<sup>th</sup> annual National Stand-Down to Prevent Falls in Construction for May 3-7, 2021. OSHA encourages construction employers and other stakeholders to join the event to promote awareness and training to address one of the industry's most serious dangers.

Fatalities caused by falls from elevation continue to be a leading cause of death for construction employees, accounting for 401 of the 1,061 construction fatalities recorded in 2019 (BLS data). Those deaths were preventable. The National Safety Stand-Down raises fall hazard awareness across the country in an effort to stop fall fatalities and injuries.

### **What is a Safety Stand-Down?**

A Safety Stand-Down is a voluntary event for employers to talk directly to employees about safety. Any workplace can hold a stand-down by taking a break to focus on fall hazards and reinforcing the importance of fall prevention. Employers of companies not exposed to fall hazards, can also use this opportunity to have a conversation with employees about the other job hazards they face, protective methods, and the company's safety policies and goals. It can also be an opportunity for employees to talk to management about fall and other job hazards they see.

### **Who Can Participate?**

Anyone who wants to prevent hazards in the workplace can participate in the Stand-Down. In past years, participants included commercial construction companies of all sizes, residential construction contractors, sub- and independent contractors, highway construction companies, the U.S. Military, unions, trade associations, employee interest organizations, and safety equipment manufacturers.

### **Partners**

OSHA is partnering with key groups to assist with this effort, including the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA), OSHA approved State Plans, State consultation programs, the Center for Construction Research and Training (CPWR), the American Society of Safety Professionals (ASSP), the National Safety Council, the National Construction Safety Executives (NCSE), the U.S. Air Force, and the OSHA Training Institute (OTI) Education Centers.

### **How to Conduct a Safety Stand-Down**

Companies can conduct a Safety Stand-Down by taking a break to have a toolbox talk or another safety activity such as conducting safety equipment inspections, developing rescue plans, or discussing job specific hazards. Management is encouraged to plan a stand-down that works best for their workplace anytime.

See [Suggestions to Prepare for a Successful "Stand-Down"](#) and [Highlights from the Past Stand-Downs](#).

OSHA also hosts an Events page with events that are free and open to the public to help employers and employees find events in your area. If you plan to host a free event that is open to the public, see OSHA's [Events page](#) to submit the event details and to contact your [Regional Stand-Down Coordinator](#).

### **Certificate of Participation**

Employers will be able to provide feedback about their Stand-Down and download a Certificate of Participation following the Stand-Down.

### **Share Your Story with OSHA**

If you want to share information with OSHA on your Safety Stand-Down, Fall Prevention Programs or suggestions on how to improve future initiatives like this, you can email [oshastanddown@dol.gov](mailto:oshastanddown@dol.gov). Also share your Stand-Down story on social media, with the hashtag: **#StandDown4Safety**.



# Monthly Toolbox Talk

## Passive Fall Protection Systems

With few exceptions, OSHA regulations require that you be protected from falls when walking or working 6' or more above a lower level. When most people think of fall protection, they think of personal fall arrest systems; however, there are a couple of fall protection systems that are more effective in protecting you from falls.

## Hierarchy of Fall Protection Controls

1. Eliminate the fall hazard
2. Passive fall protection
3. Fall restraint
4. Fall arrest

## Passive Fall Protection vs. Active Fall Protection

A passive fall protection system is static, fixed, or unmoving. Once installed, passive systems don't require active participation from you in order to provide protection. Except for safety nets, passive fall protection systems prevent you from falling at all. Passive protection systems include barricades, guardrails, hole covers, stair rails and hand rails, and safety nets.

Active fall protection systems, on the other hand, involve active participation by you, are movable, and require the use of special gear. Active fall protection systems include fall arrest and fall restraint. These systems comprise of a body harness, lanyard, an anchor, lifeline, and connectors such as snap hooks.

Today we're going to talk about each of the passive fall protection systems, except safety nets.

## Guardrails

Guardrail systems consist of top rails, midrails, toeboards, and posts.

- The top rails must be smooth-surfaced, capable of withstanding at least 200 pounds of downward or outward force, and 42" (plus or minus 3") above the working/walking surface.
- Midrails must be midway between the top edge of the guardrail system and the walking/working level and capable of withstanding at least 150 pounds of force applied in any direction at any point along the midrail.
- Top rails and midrails must not cause a projection hazard by overhanging the terminal posts.
- Toeboards must be 3 1/2" minimum vertical height from its top edge to the floor, securely fastened, and not have more than 1/4" clearance above the floor level.
- Guardrail systems must not have rough or jagged surfaces that would cause punctures, lacerations, or snagged clothing.
- Wire rope guardrails must be flagged at 6' intervals and when a force of 200 pounds is applied, it can deflect no more than 3".
- Wire rope guardrails are guardrails, NOT fall arrest tie off points.

## Hole Covers

The fall protection standard (29 CFR §1926.500(b)) defines a hole as "a gap or void 2 inches...or more in its least dimension, in a floor, roof, or other walking/working surface."

Hole Covers must be:

- Strong enough to support at least twice the anticipated weight of workers, equipment and materials that may be imposed.
- Large enough to provide appropriate overlap

- Secured to prevent displacement by wind, equipment, or workers.
- Color coded or clearly marked with "HOLE" or "COVER" to warn of the hazard.

## Stair Rails and Hand Rails

A couple of definitions are needed here. A stair rail is similar to a guardrail in construction and purpose. It is to prevent you from falling off the stairs. A hand rail provides you with support in the event of a slip or trip when using the stairs.

Stairways having four or more risers or those rising more than 30", must have at least one handrail and a stair rail system along each unprotected side or edge. The top edge of the stair rail can serve as a handrail.

Stair rails must not be less than 36" above the tread surface and if serving as a handrail not more than 37" high. Stair rails, like guardrails, must have midrails and posts.

Handrails must not be more than 37" or less than 30" above the tread surface and provide an adequate handhold to grasp.

## Maintenance

Although once installed, passive fall protection systems don't require active participation, they should be inspected periodically to identify deterioration and/or abuse. Any weakened, broken, or removed parts must be repaired or replaced immediately.

## HOW THIS TOPIC APPLIES TO THIS JOB:

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