



## The Basics of Fall Protection

Falls are one of the leading causes of job-related injuries and fatalities in America. On any given day, every worker – even one experienced with working at heights – is at risk of having a fall and needs the best protection possible. It's important to periodically revisit basic fall protection information to keep a safe working environment and maintain a substantial fall protection management program.

### **Common Causes of Falls:**

Many different events can lead to a fall, but the most common are slips. Falls can occur as a result of:

- Losing balance
- Losing grip on support
- Support moving or giving way
- Tripping
- Surface breaking
- Stepping in a hole

Frequently, just before falling, the employee was either climbing up or down, lifting or carrying something, stepping backward, or using tools or equipment. Being at heights significantly increases the impact of a fall and increases the possibility of a fatality. When creating a fall protection system, keep these common causes in mind. Serious injuries can occur from any fall and it's important to remember that workers of all experience levels are at risk of falling.

### **What does fall protection consist of?**

When you hear 'fall protection', you likely think of equipment like rooftop guardrails, safety nets or harnesses. While these are critical pieces of fall protection, there is much more to think about if you're going to have a comprehensive and compliant fall protection system.

#### Active vs. passive fall protection

Passive fall protection refers to anything that is designed to prevent a person from falling, while active fall protection refers to anything designed to stop, or arrest, a person already falling.

One of the main benefits of a passive fall prevention system is the fact that it does not require any specialized personnel to operate it and it does not require ongoing adjustments or alterations, while an active system usually requires specialized training and regular recalibration.

Passive equipment systems include:

- Safety nets
- Guardrails
- Walkways
- Skylight covers
- Warning line systems
- Active equipment systems include:

- Anchor points
- Body harnesses
- Lanyards
- Lifelines
- Snap Hooks

### **Height safety is everyone's responsibility**

Both employers and employees play an important role in the fall protection system in place at their companies. Certain actions and behaviors can be encouraged to eliminate fall hazards, prevent falls, and protect workers.

Employers are responsible for:

- Providing working conditions free of known dangers
- Identifying and eliminating fall hazards at the work site
- Pre-planning for retrieval and ensuring that employees aren't seriously injured if a fall does occur
- Being diligent about educating and training employees on properly identifying fall hazards and following safe practices

Employees are responsible for:

- Following safe work practices
- Properly using equipment
- Being proactive about receiving up-to-date training regularly
- Learning to identify fall hazards and recognize unsafe practices
- Being aware of the tasks that increase the risk of falling
- Understanding how to control exposure to fall hazards

### **OSHA requirements**

OSHA requirements are the accepted standard for workplace fall protection practices. Even if workers are only occasionally exposed to heights, it's important to have a fall protection management program in place that complies with OSHA regulations. An effective fall protection system protects all of us.

OSHA requirements include:

- Fall protection must be provided at elevations of 4 feet in general industry workplaces, 5 feet in shipyards, 6 feet in the construction industry, and 8 feet in long shoring operations. Fall protection must be provided when working over dangerous equipment and machinery, regardless of the fall distance.
- Floor holes or openings must be covered or guarded immediately. Covers must be constructed to effectively support two times the weight of employees, equipment, and materials that may be on the cover at any given time.

- Employers must develop, implement, and commit to a fall protection management program, provide training about the program to employees, and evaluate the program regularly to determine if any changes or updates are necessary.

If you're not sure if you're current system meets the OSHA requirements, or you want to learn more about effective, compliant height safety systems, get in touch with a W.W. Cannon fall protection expert at 214-357-2846 or 1-800-442-3061.