

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: Basic Scaffold Safety – Protecting Workers from Falling Objects

[Reference 1910 Subpart D / 1926 Subpart L]

Heads Up! That's what you might expect to hear shouted out if someone working on a scaffold accidentally drops, kicks, or bumps a tool, piece of equipment, or material, causing it to fall to a lower level or the ground. However, such a verbal warning might very well be too little and too late. That is because being struck by something as small as a bolt or a nut falling from above can cause a severe injury, or could even be deadly, due to the increased velocity and force the object develops as it is falling.

Therefore, Federal OSHA scaffold standards spells out several requirements for preventive measures to be taken, including but not limited to the following, when we work on or near scaffolding so as to help avoid injuries and fatalities associated with falling objects:

- Rule number one is to always wear an approved hard hat when working on or near scaffolding;
- In addition to wearing hardhats, each employee on a scaffold shall be provided with additional protection from falling hand tools, debris, and other small objects through the installation of toe-boards, screens, or guardrail systems, or through the erection of debris nets, catch platforms, or canopy structures that contain or deflect the falling objects;
- More specifically, where there is a danger of tools, materials, or equipment falling from a scaffold and striking employees below, the following provisions apply;
 - The area below the scaffold to which objects can fall shall be barricaded, and employees shall not be permitted to enter the hazard area; or,
 - A toe-board shall be erected along the edge of platforms more than 10 feet above lower levels for a distance sufficient to protect employees below.
- Protection options where tools, materials, or equipment are piled to a height higher than the top edge of the toe-board include:
 - Installing paneling or screening that extends from the toe-board or platform to the top of the guardrail for a distance sufficient to protect employees below; or,
 - Installing a guardrail system with openings small enough to prevent passage of potential falling objects; or,
 - Installing a canopy structure, debris net, or catch platform that is strong enough to withstand the impact forces of the potential falling objects over the employees below.
- When the falling objects are too large, heavy or massive to be contained or deflected by any of the above-listed measures, employees must make sure to place such potential falling objects away from the edge of the surface from which they could fall, and shall secure those objects as necessary to prevent their falling (*discuss general measures such as chocking rolling objects, utilizing tethers, etc.*);

Making sure the protective systems selected are installed and meet additional specific strength and design criteria established by OSHA is the responsibility of the Competent Person. However, we want you to have a basic understanding of the general protective measures required so you will avoid removing or by-passing them when working on a scaffold. So if you are ever in doubt about the precautions being taken to prevent being struck by falling objects, check with the Competent Person for further guidance.

Does anyone have any questions about these basic OSHA requirements to protect workers from being struck by objects falling from scaffold platforms? Thank you for your participation. Please make sure to sign your name on the training certification form so you get credit for attending today's training session.

