

TOOLBOX TALK: FALL PROTECTION

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Six feet. That is the number this whole talk is about. Six feet to an unprotected edge on this job and something has to be protecting you, every time, not most of the time.

The talk

Falls kill more construction workers than anything else, and it is not close. Most of those falls are from under thirty feet, and a large share are from under twenty. You do not need a tower crane to die from a fall. A second story window opening will do it.

In construction the trigger is six feet to a lower level. At six feet, an unprotected side or edge needs a guardrail, a safety net or a personal fall arrest system. There is no fourth option called being careful.

Guardrails are the best of the three because they work whether or not you remember to do anything. A harness only works if it is worn, adjusted, and connected to a real anchor. Two out of three is a fall with a longer story attached.

The anchor is where most people get it wrong. An anchor for fall arrest has to hold five thousand pounds per person, or be designed by a qualified person with a safety factor of two. A vent pipe is not an anchor. A conduit run is not an anchor. Another guy is not an anchor.

Then there is the math nobody does. Free fall, plus the deceleration distance of the shock pack, plus the length of your body below the D ring, plus a safety margin. That is easily eighteen feet with a six foot lanyard. If you are clipped at your feet on the second floor, you will hit the ground before the system stops you. Anchor overhead, use a retractable in low clearance, and know how far you will actually fall.

Last thing. If somebody does fall and is hanging in a harness, that is a rescue clock, not a phone call you make when you get around to it. Suspension in a harness cuts off circulation in the legs. The plan for getting them down has to exist before the fall, not after.

Point at these before anybody starts

- Every unprotected edge on this site right now, and what is protecting it
- The anchor point each person is going to use today, named out loud

- One harness, inspected in front of everybody: webbing, stitching, D ring, buckles, label
- The fall clearance below the work area, floor to floor, counted out
- Any floor hole or opening, and whether the cover is secured and marked
- Where the rescue gear is and who is calling 911 if somebody ends up hanging

The rules that apply

- Six feet to a lower level in construction means guardrails, nets or a personal fall arrest system, with no exceptions for short tasks.
- Anchors for fall arrest hold 5,000 pounds per attached person, or are designed by a qualified person with a safety factor of at least two.
- Anchor overhead where you can. Clipping at foot level roughly doubles your free fall distance.
- Inspect the harness and lanyard before every use, and remove from service anything that has already arrested a fall.
- Floor holes and roof openings get a cover that is secured, marked and able to hold twice the load that could be put on it.
- There must be a rescue plan for a suspended worker that does not start with waiting for the fire department.

Ask the crew

- Name your anchor point for today. Not the general area, the actual thing you are clipping to.
- How far is the floor below your work area, and how far will you actually drop before the system stops you?
- If somebody is hanging in a harness in ten minutes, what is the first thing we do?

Close with this

Nobody works over an unprotected six foot edge on this job. If the protection is not there yet, the work waits until it is.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

	Print name and signature
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This talk is general safety information for a crew briefing, not legal advice and not a substitute for the training your employees are required to have. Standards are quoted for orientation only. Check the current text of the standard and your own state plan, which may be stricter than the federal rule.