



TOOLBOX TALK

Guardrails, Stairways and Openings

Providing good protection of wall and floor openings is one way to prevent falls at heights of 6 feet or more. Make sure that all wall and floor openings are properly guarded and if you have to remove guardrails to work, put them back in place when you are done. Guardrails are required to be placed at 42" +/-3 and mid-rails at 21" +/-3. Make sure that you understand the applicable rules regarding when wall and floor openings must be guarded.

SAFE PRACTICES: GUARDRAILS

- A guardrail is used to protect a floor opening or open sided floor six feet above the next level down. They can be found around elevator shafts, pits, duct chases, platforms, etc.
- Guardrails must be capable of withstanding, without failure, a force of at least 200 pounds applied in any outward or downward direction on the top, 150 pounds on the mid rail and 50 pounds for the toe board.
- A typical guardrail consists of a smooth surfaced top rail, approximately 42" +/-3", with a mid rail at 21" +/-3", and a toe board above the walking or working level.
- Smooth metal and/or pipe may be used for guardrails as long as minimum standards are met.
- Guardrails should be installed on all stairs prior to use.
- If guardrails/handrails are damaged or removed they must be repaired immediately.

SAFE PRACTICES: STAIRWAYS

- Stairways or ladders should be provided at worker points of access where there is a break in elevation of 19 inches.
- Ensure stair rails (not less than 36 inches in height) are installed on all stairways with four or more risers, or rising more than 30 inches.
- Ensure that stairways are not used to store materials.
- Except during construction of the actual stairway, skeleton metal frame structures and steps must not be used, unless the stairs are filled and secured with temporary treads and landings.
- Mid rail screens, mesh, intermediate vertical members or equivalent intermediate structural members should be provided between the top rail and the stair rail system.
- A handrail is required on stairways that rise more than 30 inches or that have four or more risers.
- Temporary handrails should have a minimum clearance of three inches between the handrail and the walls, stair rail system and other objects.
- The unprotected sides and edges of stairway landings should be protected by a standard guardrail system.
- A platform must be provided at all locations where doors or gates open directly into a stairway.
- The swing of gates and doors should not reduce the effective width of the platform to less than 20 inches.

SAFE PRACTICES: COVERS

- Covers may be used to protect workers from falling into openings in floors, roofs, etc.
- They must be capable of supporting, without failure, twice the maximum intended load and be secured to prevent accidental displacement. Color code the cover or mark it with the word 'hole' or 'cover' to provide warning of the hazard.

As with any safety device, take the time to inspect all handrails, guardrails and covers before depending on them. Never lean on a guardrail unless you're sure it's strong enough to hold you. Avoid floor hole covers; walk around them. The person who installed it may not have secured it properly. When removing a hole cover, don't step forward or backward into the hole. A number of construction workers have been injured and some even killed by walking into a hole they just uncovered!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Has the job-site been inspected (by the competent person) as to the fall hazards present and appropriate measures taken, before work begins?
 2. Is the job-site inspected at the beginning of each workday, and as the day proceeds, for new fall hazards?
 3. Do you know of any locations on this job where wall/floor opening protection is either lacking or defective?
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PUT YOUR

GUARD UP

GUARDRAILS PROTECT EVERYONE

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