

Historically, falls are the leading cause of fatalities in construction, accounting for a 1/3rd of all fatalities in the industry.

Incidents involving falls are generally complex events, frequently involving a variety of factors. The standards for fall protection deal with both human and equipment-related issues to protect workers from falls.

When do I need fall protection?

In Washington State, generally, fall protection is required when working 4 feet above the ground in construction. There are exceptions to fall protection at 4 feet, but it depends on the task that you are performing and what your fall height exposure is.

Let's review when fall protection is required:

0 feet - regardless of height, if you are exposed to an impalement hazard or dangerous equipment, an example would be rebar or conduit protruding from the ground.

4 feet on all walking work surfaces

10 feet for all other surfaces, or the performance of roofing work on low pitched roofs or Leading-Edge Work. (An example would be advancing of decking.)

What is fall protection?

Fall protection is fall restraint and/or fall arrest. What is the difference?

Fall restraint prevents your exposure to a fall. Fall restraint systems are guardrails, hole covers, warning lines or personal fall restraint systems. Fall restraint is the most effective system to use but may not always be applicable in each case. Therefore, the second type of fall protection is fall arrest. Fall arrest equipment keeps you from hitting a lower surface when working from height.

Your personal fall arrest system has an anchorage, a full body harness, with either a shock-absorbing lanyard or a self-retracting lifeline.

When do I need fall protection and how do I determine what type of fall protection to use?

1. You must evaluate the task you will be performing and what type of fall protection is needed.
2. Ask yourself, could I use either fall arrest or fall restraint, and what would provide me the best protection?
3. What are the other requirements I should consider?
 - a. You must follow your company's policies and requirements
 - b. A fall protection plan must be filled out and available on the jobsite if your fall exposures exceeds 10 feet, including a rescue plan.
 - c. Install your fall protection systems as required by the manufacturer

And finally, workers must be trained, and systems must be inspected by a competent person such as your supervisor, foremen and/or safety professional.

Never guess!!

Falls from elevation are one of the biggest causes of workers being seriously injured or killed annually. Look out for yourself, co-worker, and others. If it looks wrong, it probably is. It is never wrong to ask a question such as "is this safe". No one should ever fall from elevation, there are very good systems available to keep you safe and from hitting the surface below.