



Fall Protection

Working at Heights Safety Reference Guide

Falls are the second-leading cause of workplace fatalities in the United States. Federal law (OSHA 1926.502) requires fall protection for any work surface four feet or more above a lower level. This guide explains your options, your responsibilities, and how to inspect and use fall protection equipment correctly.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Required at 4+ Feet	Any working surface with an unprotected edge 4 feet or more above a lower level requires fall protection.
Two Types	Fall Restraint prevents you from reaching an unprotected edge. Fall Arrest stops you if you fall.
Anchor Strength	Your anchor point must be able to support 5,000 lbs per worker (roughly the weight of a pickup truck).
Inspect Daily	Inspect all harnesses, lanyards, and hardware for fraying, cracks, or defects before every use.

FALL RESTRAINT SYSTEMS

- Guardrails are the most common fall restraint. Top rail must be between 39 and 45 inches above the working surface.
- Guardrail top rail must withstand 200 lbs of force in any direction.
- Mid rail must be placed midway between the top rail and working surface and withstand 150 lbs.
- Top and mid rails must be at least 1/4 inch in diameter to prevent lacerations.
- Toe boards must be 3.5 inches high and withstand 50 lbs of force.

PERSONAL FALL ARREST SYSTEMS



Components of a Fall Arrest System

- Full body harness
- Shock-absorbing lanyard or rope grab
- Vertical lifeline
- Anchorage rated for 5,000 lbs minimum

The anchor must be above your head, not at your feet. A 6-foot person tied off at the feet could free-fall up to 12 feet.

Use the shortest lanyard possible. The shorter the tie-off, the shorter the fall.

Free fall distance must not exceed 6 feet.

Never tie a knot in a lanyard. This reduces its rated strength significantly.

Never join multiple lanyards together to reach an anchor point.

WHAT NOT TO DO

Do not tie off to vent pipes, electrical conduits, light fixtures, or guardrails.

Do not allow more than one worker to tie off to an anchorage unless it is engineer-approved for multiple loads.

Do not unhook from fall protection while exposed to a fall of more than 6 feet.

Do not use any equipment involved in a fall until it has been inspected and cleared.

Do not allow someone else to rig your equipment without verifying it yourself.

EQUIPMENT INSPECTION

- Check rope and webbing for fraying, cuts, or abrasion.
- Check all hardware (buckles, snap hooks, D-rings) for cracks or deformation.
- Check snap hooks for proper self-locking function.
- Tag and remove any equipment with visible defects.
- Replace all components involved in a fall immediately.

If there is any doubt about the safety of your equipment, do not use it. Replace it.

FALL PROTECTION PRE-WORK CHECKLIST



Complete before working at any height of 4 feet or more.

- ☐ Identified all work areas 4+ feet above a lower level
- ☐ Guardrails in place and at correct height (39–45 inches)
- ☐ Harness inspected: no fraying, broken buckles, or cracks
- ☐ Lanyard inspected: no damage, no knots, self-locking hooks work
- ☐ Anchorage confirmed to support 5,000 lbs per worker
- ☐ Anchor point is above head height for work area
- ☐ Free fall distance limited to 6 feet maximum
- ☐ Never unhooking while exposed to a fall greater than 6 feet

This document is part of the Meat Institute Worker Safety Series, supporting Reporting Metric A4: Supervisors lead safety huddles and toolbox chats regularly with hourly workers.

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