Oregon OSHA Construction Corner: 
Seven ways to prevent falls at your site

For many in the construction industry, equipment is the first thing that comes to mind as a means for preventing falls. But fall protection is more than just equipment. Here are seven ways to prevent falls at your site.

1. Make fall protection part of your safety program and ensure that everyone has a role to play in preventing falls

Effective safety programs have managers and employees who are committed to safety and involved in keeping the site hazard free.

2. Enforce safe practices with on-the-job supervision

Effective supervisors know how to motivate employees and, when discipline is necessary, they know how to apply it fairly. Essential tasks for supervisors:

- Verify that employees have been trained and can safely perform their work.
- Periodically review the safety performance of each employee.
- Instruct, retrain, or discipline employees who are not working safely.
- Closely supervise new employees after they have been trained.
- Require employees to demonstrate they can work safely before permitting them to work independently.

3. Prepare a safety policy

Does your company have a written safety policy? It should. A written policy reflects commitment to a safe and healthful workplace, summarizes management and employee responsibilities, and emphasizes the importance of the safety program. Keep the policy brief, commit to it, and enforce it.
4. Designate competent and qualified persons

The competent person
- Is responsible for recognizing hazards that cause falls and warning workers about the hazards
- Trains employees to recognize fall hazards and follow safety procedures
- Serves as the monitor when a safety-monitoring system is used as a fall-protection method
- Determines – when safety nets are used – if the nets meet Subdivision 3/M requirements
- Inspects a personal fall-arrest system after it arrests a fall and determines if the system is damaged
- Evaluates any alteration in a personal fall-arrest system and determines if it is safe to use

The qualified person
Supervises the design, installation, and use of horizontal lifeline systems and fall-restraint and fall-arrest anchors.

5. Plan to prevent falls

Consider factors such as the following to help you plan your job:
- Which areas of the project are most likely to have fall hazards? What can you do to prevent falls from happening?
- What tasks could expose employees to fall hazards?
- Are walking and working surfaces structurally sound and stable?
- How will employees access and move about the structure to do their jobs? Will they move horizontally, vertically, or in both directions?
- Will guardrails and covers for holes meet Subdivision 3/M requirements?
- Are there existing anchors for arrest and restraint systems? Do they meet Subdivision 3/M requirements?
- Have employees been trained to use ladders properly?
- Will other contractors’ employees be exposed to falls after your employees finish their work? Who is responsible for ensuring that fall protection, such as guardrails and covers, are replaced if they have been removed to finish a job?
6. Train workers about fall protection

Don’t assume your employees know how to protect themselves from falls. They may not be familiar with fall hazards at a new job site or know how to protect themselves until you train them.

Employees must be trained before they begin tasks that could expose them to falls and before they use fall-protection equipment. They must know how to recognize fall hazards and follow safe practices.

**Put it in writing:** You must document in writing that employees have been trained and that they know what fall-protection systems or methods to use, how to use them, and when to use them, regardless of their experience. Include their names, training dates, and the trainer’s signature.

Employees must be retrained for any of the following reasons:

- They don’t recognize fall hazards.
- They don’t understand the procedures that control the hazards.
- Changes in the workplace or the fall-protection systems or methods make previous training obsolete.

7. Use equipment that prevents falls from happening

When possible, use equipment such as guardrails, covers, and restraint systems that will eliminate employees’ chances of falling.

If it’s not possible to eliminate fall hazards, protect workers if they do fall. Use equipment that will minimize the risk of injury if a worker does fall. Options include personal fall-arrest systems and safety nets. Also, develop a rescue plan that tells employees how to respond if something does go wrong.

Source: Oregon OSHA Health and Safety Resource, April-May 2019