

Fall Protection in Construction

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On July 3, 2018, OSHA announced that citations had been issued to Bluewater Construction Solutions Inc. in Florida for failing to abide by fall protection requirements for its employees. The fines of \$48,778 were due to Bluewater failing to install guardrails, employ the use of safety nets, or provide and require the use of fall arrest systems when employees were working over a height of six feet.

OSHA's fall protection requirements in the construction industry are found in 29CFR1926 Subpart M. The employer is responsible for evaluating all work areas and surfaces where employees are required to be in the performance of their work, prior to exposing employees to the area and a potential hazard. Walking and working surfaces must be evaluated by the employer to determine that the surface is of sufficient structural integrity to support the weight of any and all employees, materials, and equipment that will be occupying the surface.

Next, the employer must evaluate if the work area is six feet or more above the next lowest level. If it is, the employer must determine if there are unprotected sides, edges, or holes from which an employee may fall from. "Unprotected sides and edges means any side or edge (except at entrances to points of access) of a walking/working surface, e.g., floor, roof, ramp, or runway where there is no wall or guardrail system at least 39 inches (1.0 m) high" (OSHA, 2018). If so, the employer is required to protect the employee from falling by one of three methods: by installing railings or safety nets, or by requiring the use of a personal fall arrest system. Additionally, holes (defined as an opening two inches or greater) must be protected by a cover to prevent employees stepping through the opening or from tools and equipment falling through the hole to a lower level. Wall openings also require fall protection when the opening is six feet or more above the lower level and the bottom of the opening is less than 39 inches above the floor.

References

Occupational Safety and Health Administration. (2018). *Safety and health regulations for construction*. Retrieved July 3, 2018, from https://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=STANDARDS&p_id=10757