

UE NEWS HEALTH AND SAFETY

Set for a Fall — Ladders and Heights

UE News H&S, April 1996

Ladders, stairways and scaffolds are a major source of injuries and fatalities among U.S. workers. About 25,000 construction workers alone are injured annually due to falls from ladders and stairways. Of these, about 35 die each year. Similarly, about 50 workers die each year in falls from scaffolds.

Whenever people in your plant, shop or building work at elevated locations, you and your local's health and safety committee need to ask two basic questions:

- Are all workers protected from falls?
- If not, what further measures need to be taken to prevent falls?

Here are some guidelines which OSHA recommends for preventing falls. These can be helpful in identifying problems and preventing accidents.

But don't call OSHA as soon as you find a violation. The rate of OSHA inspections is at an all-time low — instead OSHA listens to the sweet-talk of managers that "everything is all right." Raise the issue first at a health and safety committee meeting, or file a grievance under your contract.

LADDERS

Fixed ladders must have rungs at least 16 inches wide, and spaced uniformly no more than 12 inches apart.

Fixed ladders longer than 20 feet must have cages, wells or other ladder safety devices. Landing platforms must be provided at least every 30 feet.

Step ladders must have a metal spreader or locking device strong enough to hold the front and back sections apart under a load.

A simple rule for setting up a single ladder or other non-self-supporting ladders is to place it so that the distance from the base to the wall is about one-fourth of the working length of the ladder.

All portable ladders should be able to support at least 200 pounds. A portable ladder used to gain access to a roof must extend at least three feet beyond the point of contact with the roof (to give support getting onto and off the roof).

Make sure every rung of the ladder is kept free of grease or oil.

If portable metal ladders are used where they might contact energized electrical power lines, they must

have non-conductive side rails.

SCAFFOLDS

Guardrails must be installed on all open sides of scaffolds more than 10 feet off the ground or floor.

It is especially important that the ends of the scaffolds have guardrails. Often scaffolds have rails along the length of the walkway, but the end frames are not guarded. These unprotected openings can result in serious injuries and deaths.

Guardrails should consist of top rails about 42 inches high (3.5 feet), posts and midrails to prevent slipping under the top rail. Scaffold cross-bracing (X-braces) are not an acceptable substitute for guardrails, according to OSHA.

Toeboards at least four inches high must be provided. If people regularly work or pass under the scaffold, wire or plastic mesh must be placed on the guardrail as well.

Scaffolds covered by ice or snow cannot be used until the ice or snow is removed, and the planks sanded to prevent slipping. Work must also be halted during storms or high winds.

STAIRWAYS

Every flight of stairs having four or more steps must be provided with a standard railing on all open sides.

Stairways with less than 44 inches wide and closed on both sides still have at least one handrail, preferably on the right hand side when walking down the steps.

Stairways between 44 and 88 inches wide must have handrails on each side, whether the sides are enclosed or open.

Stairways 88 inches wide or more must have at least three handrails, one on each side and one near the middle.

All fixed stairways must be at least 22 inches wide.

Winding stairs must have a handrail offset to prevent walking on portions of the treads less than six inches long.

* * *

CONGRATULATIONS to all union members and friends! Rep. Cass Ballenger (R., N.C.) has conceded that his nefarious health and safety "reform" bill (HR 1834) will not be brought to a vote in this session, thanks to your political pressure. Your visits to Congressional offices, letters and petitions paid off. Now we can turn our attention to defeating the anything but "moderate" Gregg-Kassebaum OSHA deform bill (S. 1423). It would eliminate routine inspections for most U.S. companies and let management's fox guard the health-and-safety chicken coop. It would eliminate workers' rights to get an inspection based on a valid written complaint. And it would allow employers to set up company unions to deal with health and safety issues.

[Home](#) -> [Health & Safety Index](#) -> Article

[Home](#) • [About UE](#) • [Organize!](#) • [Independent Unions](#) • [Search](#) • [Site Guide](#) • [What's New](#) • [Contact UE](#)
[UE News](#) • [Political Action](#) • [Info for Workers](#) • [Resources](#) • [Education](#) • [Health & Safety](#) • [International](#) • [Links](#)