Opening the Way to A Deadly Fall



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WHAT'S AT STAKE?

The human factor is the reason why there are many incidents of severe injuries and even fatalities in floor opening falls. This occurs through negligence either gross or inadvertent.

This results in loss of productivity, down time, and replacement costs. Not to mention the human factor where lives of workers are negatively impacted in many aspects.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Opening in floor and roofs are part of the work environment during construction, renovation and demolition. Also, in the oil and gas industry, objects falling onto workers from opening are potential hazards.

Half-measures are not satisfactory. Many workers have been severely injured and others have died as a result of following through a floor opening.

For Example

- A worker cleaning up after a roofing crew picks up a piece of plywood, not realizing it covers an opening, into which he falls.
- A worker passing through a renovation site steps on a too-small covering placed over a hole and not secured. The board breaks, or, one end tips into the hole. The worker falls down the opening.
- Skylights and other roof features not designed to bear weight also have been the route to death for workers who stepped for climbing on them.

In industrial plants, workers have fallen from catwalks over machinery or

process vessels. Holes in the runway, unguarded sides and ends have allowed workers to fall. Tanks with unguarded openings large enough for a worker to fall in have also taken many lives. Unguarded access points to fixed vertical ladders have also been the scene of fatal falls.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

There are safety laws requiring certain types of guards around openings including roof openings and floor openings, smoke shafts, vehicle repair pits, loading dock edges and other openings on walking and work surface. Preventions of falls into water or another liquid, or into a hazardous substance or object is also regulated.

By law, temporary and emergency floor and wall openings must be guarded by rails and toe boards or a cover.

There are steps to take to comply with law and regulations such as:

- The floor opening cover must be capable of supporting any load placed on it. It should be secured positively so it cannot be easily removed, and it should be labeled. The cover should go over the entire opening unless guardrails are installed.
- Ladder way floor openings and platforms must be guarded by railings and toe boards on all sites except the entrance, the entrance must be arranged so the person cannot walk directly into the opening without encountering a gate or an offset area.
- Guards are also required for hatchways and chute openings, skylight openings, pits and trap door openings and manhole floor coverings.
- Besides guardrails and nets, fall prevention and fall arrest equipment might be required for you to work safely. Learn to use the fall protection equipment and avoid hazards.
- Pay attention to good housekeeping!!
- Finally, there is another step that must be addressed to ensure proper protection to prevent the stopping of falls through openings. Workers must file reports or contact a responsible line person when he or she encounter a hazardous situation like a “floor opening”.

FINAL WORD

A clean site is not always a safe start but is the best start.