Scaffolding & Access: Safe Erection, Use and Dismantling Meeting Kit



WHAT’S AT STAKE

Falls from height are one of the leading causes of fatal workplace injuries, and scaffolding is involved in a significant portion of those incidents. In most cases the root cause is not faulty equipment. It is something overlooked, rushed, or assumed to be someone else’s responsibility. A scaffold looks stable even when it is not. That is what makes it so dangerous, and why every phase of scaffold work requires real attention.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

Scaffold hazards are not limited to working at height. They exist at every phase of the work, from the first piece going up to the last piece coming down.

During Erection

Components installed in the wrong sequence or not fully secured create a structure that looks solid but cannot support the load it will face. Base plates not properly positioned on stable, level ground cause the entire structure to shift or settle underweight. Connections that seem to hold during setup can fail once workers and materials are added. Rushing this phase is where many scaffold collapses begin.

During Active Use

Overloading is one of the most common and most dangerous mistakes on scaffolding. Exceeding the rated capacity with workers, tools, and materials on the same platform at the same time puts the structure under stress it was not designed to handle. Missing guardrails or planking gaps on open sides are another serious risk, often because someone removed a section temporarily and did not replace it before the next person climbed up.

During Dismantling

This is the phase where many scaffold injuries actually happen. The pressure to get equipment down and out of the way quickly leads workers to remove supports

before the structure above is properly controlled. A section that appeared completely stable can shift suddenly when supporting members are taken out in the wrong order. Anyone nearby when this happens is at serious risk of being struck or falling.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Scaffolding safety is not one decision at the start of the job. It is a series of decisions made at every phase, from ground-level setup to the last piece being stored.

Only Qualified Workers Erect or Dismantle

If erecting or dismantling scaffold is not part of your authorized and trained role, stay clear of those phases entirely. This is not a task you can learn as you go. The structural decisions made during assembly determine how safe the scaffold will be for every person who climbs it afterward. When untrained workers make changes to a scaffold, they often do not know what they have compromised.

Inspect Before You Climb, Every Time

- **All planks:** check for cracks, warping, splits, or any visible damage before stepping on them
- **Guardrails and mid-rails:** confirm they are in place and secure on all open sides
- **Base plates and ground:** the surface must be stable, level, and not showing signs of settlement or shifting
- **All connections and locking pins:** nothing loose, missing, or incomplete anywhere on the structure
- **Access points:** ladders and entry points secure and positioned correctly before climbing

Know the Load Limit and Respect It

Every scaffold has a rated load capacity, and it applies to the total weight on the platform at one time, including workers, tools, materials, and equipment. Exceeding that limit does not produce a visible warning or a gradual failure. The structure simply fails when the load exceeds what it was designed to support. Check the scaffold tag before you start adding people and materials and stay within that limit.

Never Remove Guardrails or Work Past Gaps

If a guardrail, mid-rail, or plank is missing when you arrive at the scaffold, do not start work and do not improvise by leaning over the edge or working around the gap. Stop, report the deficiency, and wait until the scaffold is brought into compliance before anyone climbs. A task that is almost finished is never worth a fall from height. The answer is always to fix it first.

Use Fall Protection and Protect the Area Below

Wear and connect your fall arrest harness whenever you are working at or above the required threshold, even for short-duration tasks. Clipping in takes one second and could save your life. At the same time, no one should be permitted to

pass under or work below an active scaffold unless proper overhead protection is in place. Dropped tools and materials from height are a serious hazard to anyone below the platform.

FINAL WORD

A scaffold is only as safe as the attention paid to it at every stage. Inspect it before you climb, respect its limits while you work, and never assume someone else already checked it.