Staying Safe on Scaffolds



What’s at Stake?

Did you know 90% of all falls involving scaffolds happen while workers are performing routine jobs and the average height of those falls are just 12 to 15 feet? Now consider this, a 200-pound man falling just 6-feet produces 1200 pounds of force upon impact with the ground. Enough to cause disabling injuries, paralysis, and death.

What’s the Danger?

The main dangers encountered while working on a scaffold are:

1. Falls from elevations and slips and trips from debris, ice, tools and other objects on the scaffolding.
2. Instability and collapse from planks that are damaged, not properly placed and/or not secured, scaffolds that are overloaded, subjected to high winds, or being hit by a heavy equipment, vehicles or other heave objects.
3. Falling objects such as tools, equipment, and debris that aren’t caught by correctly placed guardrails, toe boards, and safety nets, and objects and tools that are accidentally dropped during work.
4. Shock and electrocution from power lines if the scaffold is erected or moved too close to power lines.

How to Protect Yourself

The regulations covering scaffolding are detailed and cover many different types of scaffolds. When it comes to working on scaffolding remember these do’s and don’ts to keep you safe.

DO

- First, you must be properly trained before you can work on a scaffold.
- Next, remember, scaffolds must be erected, dismantled, altered or moved by trained personnel and under the direct supervision of a competent person. If you aren’t sure this is the case, check with a supervisor before use.
- Before getting on a scaffold check that a competent person has inspected it. Look for the appropriate tags indicating the condition of the scaffold.

Green means the scaffold is safe, yellow means take caution, and red means do not use.
- Always wear required PPE such as, hard hat, work boots, and fall protection. When wearing fall protection, always anchor the system to a safe point that will withstand the force of a fall and prevent you from free-falling more than six-feet.
- Watch out for people on the scaffold with you and those walking or working below you. Make sure all guardrails, toe boards, and nets are in place to prevent tools and debris from falling onto people below.

DON'T

Rush or take shortcuts.

- Forget to wear your PPE, especially your fall protection; and don't forget to put your harness and lanyard on properly and secure the lanyard to a safe anchor point.
- Leave your tools or trash on the scaffold when you're done working. Pick up debris and materials and tools you aren't using while you're working.
- Work on scaffold in stormy or windy weather, or if the scaffold is covered with ice or snow.
- Overload the scaffold. In most instances, scaffolds should be capable of supporting at least four times its maximum intended load.
- Climb on any part of the scaffold that isn't designed to be climbed on. Always use a fixed ladder, internal access stairway or built-in ladder to access the working platform.
- Climb with any materials or tools in your hand. Instead, they should be hoisted up to the scaffold separately.
- Use makeshift devices, such as boxes or barrels on the scaffold platform to increase your working height.

Final Word

You can prevent harm to you and those working on and around the scaffold with you, by recognizing scaffold dangers and how to work safely despite those hazards.