Unified Fall Protection Basics for Construction Activities

Washington State has revised fall protection rules, effective October 1, 2020. This booklet provides an overview of the requirements.

Caution: This pamphlet does NOT contain everything required by the standard. Always refer to the fall protection requirements in Chapter 296-880.
Preventable falls are a leading cause of worker deaths and debilitating permanent injuries in Washington.
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How can I get help from L&I?
Regardless of height:

1. All open-sided floors, walkways, platforms or runways above or adjacent to dangerous equipment such as dip tanks, material handling equipment and similar hazards must be guarded with a standard guardrail system.

2. Holes must be guarded in accordance with the standard.

3. The employer must protect employees from falling into or onto impalement hazards such as reinforcing steel (rebar), exposed steel or wood.

Fall protection required. Applies to:

1. Walking/working surface with unprotected sides and edges or platform.

2. Ramps, runways and inclined walkways.

3. Form and reinforcing work when employees are placing or tying reinforcing steel, working on the face of formwork or reinforcing steel.

4. Steep-pitched roofs.

5. Low-pitched roofs. Applies to any work activity not listed in WAC 296-880-30005.

6. Hazardous slopes where there is a potential fall of four feet or more to a lower surface.
7. Openings where the outside bottom edge of the opening is four feet or more above a lower level and the inside bottom edge of the opening is less than 39 inches above the working surface.

8. Activities where employees use stilts; make sure to increase the height of the top rail (or equivalent member of the standard guardrail system) an amount equal to the height of the stilts. For example, you can add additional railings; just make sure guardrail system meets strength specifications.

9. Working on platforms or ladders above the protection of the guardrail system, the height of the guardrail system must either be increased or another form of fall protection must be used.

10. Locations where guardrails are temporarily removed to perform a specific task; make sure the area is constantly attended by an employee whose sole duty is to warn persons approaching of the hazard until the guardrail is replaced.
Applies to employees engaged in:

1. Work on low-pitched roofs. Fall protection is required.
2. Leading edge work (see definitions on Page 7). Fall protection is required.
3. **Excavation operations**  
   Fall protection is not required at excavations when employees are:
   - a. Directly involved with the excavation process and on the ground at the top edge of the excavation;  
      or  
   - b. Working at an excavation site where appropriate sloping of side walls has been implemented as the excavation protective system.
4. Fall protection is required for employees standing in or working in the affected area of a trench or excavation exposed to a fall hazard of ten feet or more and:
   - a. The employees are not directly involved with the excavation process;  
      or  
   - b. The employees are on the protective system or any other structure in the excavation - see WAC 296-880-30005-1(d)(ii)(B).

Note: Employees not directly involved with constructing the leading edge, or not performing roofing work must comply with WAC 296-880-30005-1(a-d), Fall Protection Required at Four Feet or More.
An employer must develop and implement a written Fall Protection Work Plan (FPWP) and include each area of the workplace where the employees are assigned and where fall hazards of ten feet or more exist. A fall protection work plan is not required where the use of a guardrail system eliminates the fall hazard. The FPWP must:

1. Identify each fall hazard in the work area.
2. Describe the method of fall arrest or fall restraint to be provided.
3. Describe the proper procedures for the assembly, maintenance, inspection, and disassembly of the fall protection system to be used.
4. Describe the proper procedures for the handling, storage and securing of tools and materials.
5. Describe the method of providing overhead protection for workers who may be within or pass through the area below the work site.
7. Be available on the job site for inspection by L&I.

Prior to permitting employees into areas where fall hazards exist, the employer shall ensure employees are trained and instructed in the items described in WAC 296-880-10020-2 (a-f).

Note: When using a safety monitor, see WAC 296-880-40045.
General Requirements
WAC 296-880-10005

(Note: This section does not include everything in WAC 296-880-10005)

1. Personal fall-arrest systems, personal fall-restraint systems, positioning-device systems and their components shall be used only for employee protection and not to hoist materials.

2. All components of personal fall-arrest systems, personal fall-restraint systems and positioning-device systems shall be inspected prior to each use according to manufacturer’s specifications for mildew, wear, damage and other deterioration.

3. Defective components shall be removed from service.

Exemptions
WAC 296-880-20010

Employees are exempt from sections WAC 296-880-20005 and WAC 296-880-30005 only under the following conditions:

1. During initial installation of the fall protection anchor, prior to engaging in any work activity or the disassembly of the fall protection anchor, after the work has been completed.

2. An employee directly involved with inspecting or estimating roof-level conditions only on low-pitched roofs, prior to the start of construction work, or after all construction work has been completed.

(Continued on next page.)
Examples of activities L&I recognizes as inspecting or estimating include:

1. Measuring a roof to determine the amount of materials needed for a project.
2. Inspecting the roof for damage without removing equipment or components.
3. Assessing the roof to determine what method of fall protection will be provided to employees.

Examples L&I does not recognize as inspecting or estimating under this exemption include:

1. Delivering, staging or storing materials on a roof.
2. Persons estimating or inspecting on roofs that would be considered a “hazardous slope.”
3. When employees must be located on vehicles or rolling stock in order to perform their job duties.

Ref: 296-880-30005-2(d)

For fall protection exemptions related to excavation work, see WAC 296-880-30005(1)(d)(i)(A) and (B).
Definitions
WAC 296-880-095

(NOTE: This is not a complete list of definitions.)

**Anchorage:**
A secure point of attachment for lifelines, lanyards or deceleration devices which is capable of withstanding the forces specified in this chapter.

**Equivalent:**
Alternative designs, materials, or methods to protect against a hazard where the employer will provide an equal or greater degree of safety for employees than the methods, materials, or designs specified in this standard.

**Hazardous slope:**
A slope from which construction work is performed where normal footing cannot be maintained without the use of devices due to the pitch of the surface, weather conditions, or surface material.

**Horizontal lifeline:**
A rail, rope, wire or synthetic cable that is installed in a horizontal plane between two anchors and used for attaching a worker’s lanyard or lifeline device while moving horizontally. Used to control dangerous pendulum-like swing falls.

**Leading edge:**
The advancing edge of a floor, roof or formwork which changes location as additional floor, roof or formwork sections are placed, formed or constructed. A leading edge is considered to be an “unprotected side or edge” during periods when it is not actively and continuously under construction.

(Continued on next page.)
Personal fall-arrest system:
A fall-arrest system that is worn to arrest the employee in a fall from elevation. It consists of an anchor point, connectors, a full body harness and may include a lanyard, deceleration device, lifeline or suitable combinations of these.

Personal fall-restraint system:
A fall-restraint system that keeps the employee from reaching a fall point such as the edge of a roof or elevated work surface. It consists of an anchor point, hardware assemblies, a full body harness and may include a lanyard, restraint lines or suitable combinations of these.

Positioning-device system:
A full-body harness or positioning harness that is rigged to allow an employee to be supported on an elevated vertical or inclined surface, such as a wall, pole or column, and work with both hands free from the body support.

Roof pitch:
- Low-pitch is 4:12 or less.
- Steep-pitch is greater than 4:12.

Roofing work:
The hoisting, storage, application and removal of roofing materials and equipment, including related insulation, sheet metal, and vapor barrier work, but not including the construction of the roof deck.

Unprotected sides and edges:
Any open side or edge of a floor, roof, balcony/deck, platform, ramp, runway or walking/working surface where there is no standard guardrail system or parapet wall of solid strength and construction that is at least 39 inches in vertical height.
Walking/working surface:
Any surface, whether horizontal or vertical, on which an employee walks, works or gains access to a work area or workplace location. Walking/working surfaces include, but are not limited to floors, the ground, roofs, ramps, bridges, runways, stairs, dock boards, formwork and reinforcing steel, but not ladders.

Warning line system:
A barrier erected on a walking and working surface or a low-pitch roof (4:12 or less) to warn employees that they are approaching an unprotected fall hazard(s).
Definitions of Fall Protection Systems

1. **Fall arrest;** arrests a fall that has occurred and includes:
   - Personal Fall Arrest  
     see WAC 296-880-40020(1-3)
   - Safety Nets  
     see WAC 296-880-40055(1-9)
   - Catch Platforms  
     see WAC 296-880-40060(1-3)

2. **Fall restraint;** restrained from falling and includes:
   - Personal Fall Restraint  
     see WAC 296-880-40025
   - Guardrail System  
     see WAC 296-880-40005(1-3)
   - Covers  
     see WAC 296-880-40015(1-3)
   - Warning-Line System  
     see WAC 296-880-40040
   - Safety Monitor  
     see WAC 296-880-40045(1-2)
   - Safety Watch  
     see WAC 296-880-40050(1-3)
     *(NOTE: Safety Watch has a limited use; refer to standard.)*

3. **Positioning-device systems;** see specifications in WAC 296-880-40030.

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How can I get help from L&I?

To request a no-cost confidential workplace safety or health consultation, visit www.Lni.wa.gov/safety-health/preventing-injuries-illnesses/request-consultation or call your local L&I office and ask for the DOSH Consultation Manager.

For more information on fall protection rules and resources, visit our Fall Protection topic page at: www.Lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-topics/search-by-topic and type in Fall Protection.

www.Lni.wa.gov/safety-health