Unified Fall Protection Basics for Construction Activities

CAUTION: Always refer to the fall protection requirements in Chapter 296-880. This pamphlet does not contain all requirements — it is merely a snapshot.

Washington State Department of
Labor & Industries
Division of Occupational Safety and Health

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General Requirements

WAC 296-880-10005

1. The employer must ensure that all surfaces on which employees will be working or walking on are structurally sound and will support them safely prior to allowing employees to work or walk on them.
2. Personal fall arrest systems, personal fall restraint system, positioning device systems, and their components shall be used only for employee protection and not to hoist materials.
3. Inspect all system components prior to each use according to manufacturer's specifications for mildew, wear, damage, and other deterioration.
4. Remove defective components from service.

Exemptions

Employees are exempt from WAC 296-880-20005 only under the following conditions (as described in WAC 296-880-20010):

1. Installing or disassembly of anchor and system—so prior to work and after work is completed.
2. An employee directly involved with inspecting or estimating roof-level conditions on low slopes prior to construction work or after all construction work has been completed.

3. This exemption does not apply on steep pitch roofs, where construction work is underway, or when fall protection systems or equipment meeting the requirements of this chapter have been installed and are available for workers to use for pre-work and post-work inspections, investigations, or assessments.

Examples of activities the department recognizes as inspecting or estimating include:

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

Examples the department does not recognize as inspecting or estimating under this exemption include:

- Delivering, staging or storing materials on a roof.
- Persons estimating or inspecting on roofs that would be considered a "Hazardous Slope."

For fall protection exemptions related to excavation work, see WAC 296-880-30005(2)(b)(i).

Zero Feet

WAC 296-880-10010

Regardless of height:

1. All open sided floors, walkways, platforms, or runways above or adjacent to dangerous equipment, such as dip tanks and material handling equipment, and similar hazards must be guarded by a standard guardrail system.
2. The employer must guard holes into which an employee can trip, step into, or step through by a cover of standard strength and construction or a standard guardrail system.
3. The employer must protect employees from falling into or onto impalement hazards, such as: Reinforcing steel (rebar), exposed steel, or wood.

Training

See WAC 296-880-10015(1–5).

Four Feet or More

WAC 296-880-20005

(This section does not include everything in WAC 296-880-20005.)

Applies to:

1. Every open sided walking/working surface with unprotected sides and edges.

2. Ramps, runways, and inclined walkways.
3. Form and rebar work—while placing or tying reinforcing steel or working on the face of formwork or reinforcing steel.
4. Steep-pitched roofs. All construction work.
5. Low-pitched roofs. All construction work activities EXCEPT roofing and actively constructing a leading edge. Those activities fall under the 6-foot rule.
6. Hazardous slopes for employees are exposed to falls of 4 feet or more to a lower surface.
7. Wall opening is an opening at least 30-inches high and 18-inches wide in any wall/partition that must be guarded when the bottom of the opening is less than 39 inches above the working surface.
8. When employees are using stilts, the height of the top rail or equivalent member of the standard guardrail system must be increased (or additional railings may be added) an amount equal to the height of the stilts while maintaining the strength specifications of the guardrail system.
9. Working on platforms or ladders above the protection of the guardrail system, the employer must either increase the height of the guardrail system or select another form of fall protection.

10. When guardrails are removed to perform a specific task, the area must be constantly attended by an employee whose duty is to warn persons approaching the hazard until the guardrail is replaced.
11. Holes through which a person can fall into or through. This includes skylight holes as well as skylights that have been installed.
12. Wall openings. Also see definition under *Opening*.

Six Feet or More

WAC 296-880-30005(1)

a. Roofing work on a low-pitched roof;
b. Constructing a leading edge work (see definition).

Note: Employees not directly involved with constructing the leading edge, or are not performing roofing work must comply with WAC 296-880-20005, Fall Protection Required at 4 Feet.

Ten Feet or More

WAC 296-880-30005(2)

a. Employees engaged in erection/placement of structural members. Exception: When the erection or placement of structural members is performed on or from a floor, deck, roof, or similar surface you must comply with WAC 296-880-200, Fall protection required at four feet or more.

b. Engaged in excavation and trenching operations.

   i. Exceptions. 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.

   ii. 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 10 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.

Note: Persons considered directly involved in the excavation process include:

1. Foreman of the crew.
2. Signal person.
3. Employee hooking on pipe or other materials.
4. Grade person.

5. State, county, or city inspectors inspecting the excavation or trench.
6. An engineer or other professional conducting a quality-assurance inspection.

Fall Protection Work Plan

WAC 296-880-10020

1. Employer must develop and implement a written fall protection work plan that addresses each area of the work place where the employees are assigned and where fall hazards of 10 feet or more exist.
2. The FPWP must:
    a. Identify all fall hazards in the work area;
    b. Describe the method of fall arrest or fall restraint to be provided;
    c. Describe the proper procedures for the assembly, maintenance, inspection, and disassembly of the fall protection system to be used;
    d. Describe the proper procedures for the handling, storage, and securing of tools and materials;
    e. Describe the method of providing overhead protection for workers who may be in, or pass through the area below the work area;
    f. Describe the method for prompt, safe removal of injured workers; and
    g. Be available on the job site for inspection by the department.

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

Systems Criteria

See WAC 296-880-400.

Special Notes

1. A Safety Watch System: PROHIBITED for all construction work. See definition.
2. Warning lines can be used for activities other than roofing work and constructing a leading edge. Ref: 20005(1)(f) and 40040(1)(c). Another system would be required anytime a warning line system is used and a worker is outside the warning line system.
3. Skylights whether holes or installed must be addressed on the FPWP if the fall is 10 feet or more.

These last pages are dedicated to *some* of the definitions.

Definitions

WAC 296-880-095

(This is not a complete list of definitions.)

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

Catch platform. A type of fall arrest system that consists of a platform installed within four vertical feet of the fall hazard, is at least 45 inches wide and is equipped with a standard guardrail system on all exposed sides.

Construction work. All or any part of excavation, construction, erection, alteration, repair, demolition, and dismantling of buildings and other structures and all operations in connection therewith; the excavation, construction, alteration and repair of sewers, trenches, caissons, conduits, pipe lines, roads and all operations pertaining thereto; the moving of buildings and other structures, and to the construction, alteration, repair, or removal of wharfs, docks, bridges, culverts, trestles, piers, abutments or any other construction, alteration, repair or removal work related thereto.

Hazardous slope. A slope 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 anchorages and used for attachment of 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.

Personal fall arrest system. A fall arrest system that is worn by the employee 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 is worn by the employee to keep 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 worn by an employee, and 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 = 4:12 or less.
- Steep pitch = 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.

Structural member. A support that is a constituent part of any building or structure. Structural members include columns, girders, beams, trusses, joists, and similar supporting members of a building or structure.

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.

Warning line system. Barrier erected on a walking or working surface or a low pitch roof (4:12 or less) to warn employees they are approaching an unprotected fall hazard(s).

Division of Occupational Safety and Health

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