Falling Object Protection

The OSHA fall protection rule also covers falling object protection. The rule requires your employer to take measures to protect you from falling objects.

Hard hats are the number one defense against overhead hazards including falling objects. However, hard hats are not enough. An additional method of protection must be used when there are employees working or walking below.

Falling object protection alternatives

OSHA provides a number of falling object protection methods to select from, depending on your company’s need. The choices are toeboards and screens, guardrails, canopies, signs, barricades, or simply moving objects away from the edge.

Falling object protection methods

Guardrails — When guardrails are used to prevent materials from falling from one level to another, any openings must be small enough to prevent passage of potential falling objects.

Toeboards — When toeboards are used as protection from falling objects, they must be erected along the edges of the overhead walking/working surface for a distance sufficient to protect persons working below.

To ensure a toeboard can stop falling objects, it must be capable of withstanding a force of at least 50 pounds applied in any downward or outward direction anywhere along the toeboard.

Toeboards must be a minimum of 3.5 inches tall, have no more than 0.25 inches clearance above the surface, and be solid or have openings no larger than one inch.

Where tools, equipment, or materials are piled higher than the top edge of a toeboard, panelling or screening must be erected from the walking/working surface or toeboard to the top of a guardrail’s top rail or midrail, for a distance sufficient to protect employees below.

Materials storage — To prevent tripping hazards, no materials or equipment, except masonry and mortar, can be stored within 4 feet of working edges.

Excess mortar, broken or scattered masonry units, and all other materials and debris must be kept clear of your working area. Remove these materials regularly.

During roofing work, materials and equipment cannot be stored within 6 feet of a roof edge unless guardrails are erected at the edge. Materials near a roof edge must be stable and self-supporting.

Canopies — When used as a protection from falling objects, canopies must be strong enough to prevent collapse or penetration by objects that may fall onto them.

Being hit by falling objects at construction sites is not only possible but probable at some point in your career. Being prepared is the best defense against serious injury.