

6-40 Working at Heights

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Background

Working at heights is common in various industries, including but not limited to construction sites, maintenance, and the fire service at emergency scenes during firefighting operations or rescues.

Ontario identifies working at heights as the exposure to the risk of falling from a height of 3 metres or more. This could include, but is not limited to, working from ground ladders, rooftops, or an aerial platform at the scene of emergencies or during training evolutions.

In emergency response situations, the ability to implement certain fall protection measures may be influenced by operational urgency and environmental conditions. Employers and supervisors should assess risks and apply reasonable precautions appropriate to the circumstances.

Concerns/hazards

Working at heights is one of the most dangerous tasks a worker can be assigned. Fire scene or rescues may pose a significant risk including falls, unstable surfaces and falling objects. Statistics show falls from heights often result in serious injuries or death.

Working at heights is common practice during fire and rescue operations, therefore it is essential to prevent serious injuries or fatalities. Employers should assess fall hazards and consider implementing appropriate controls to reduce the risk of injury by having a safety program in place for firefighters.

Many conditions at an emergency scene heighten the risk of falls such as unstable footing, adverse weather and scene conditions, structural collapse, falling debris, inadequate training, or the lack of proper personal protective equipment for the task.

Actions for employers

Employers should:

- Establish clear operating guidelines for working at heights
- assess fall hazards associated with the work being performed and implement appropriate measures to eliminate or control the risk of falling
- provide suitable fall-protection systems appropriate to the task, equipment and circumstances
- provide training and instruction appropriate to the tasks, equipment and fall-protection systems being used, and determine when construction-project working-at-heights training is required under O. Reg. 213/91 and O. Reg. 297/13
- conduct regular training on the use of personal protective equipment and other equipment used for working at heights
- inspect and maintain fall-protection equipment, ladders, working platforms and other equipment used for working at heights in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions
- where aerial ladders, aerial platforms or other elevating devices are used:
 - consider aerial-device load requirements during the specification, design and approval stages, particularly as they relate to fall protection
 - ensure that engineered anchor points are suitable for their intended purpose
 - clearly identify whether anchor points are intended for travel restraint, fall restricting or fall arrest
 - provide fall-protection equipment that is compatible with the intended use of the aerial-device anchor points
 - consult the aerial apparatus manufacturer or a qualified engineer where there is uncertainty about the intended use or adequacy of an anchor point, or the ability of the aerial device to withstand the forces imposed by the selected fall-protection system
- develop procedures for the rescue of a firefighter following an arrested fall where a fall-arrest system is used

Safety considerations

Consider including the following in your procedures or standard operating guidelines:

- select the appropriate fall-protection system for the task, including travel restraint, work positioning, fall restricting or fall arrest, where applicable
- when operating at heights, consider environmental and operational conditions that may affect fall risk, including lighting, weather, footing and structural stability
- ensure fall-protection equipment and personal protective equipment are in good condition and are inspected, maintained and used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions
- ensure that components of a fall-protection system are compatible with each other, the intended anchorage and the equipment being used
- ensure that the selected life safety harness or ladder belt does not adversely interfere with the use or operation of other personal protective equipment, such as self-contained breathing apparatus or bunker gear
- use appropriate fall-protection measures during training where firefighters may be exposed to a fall hazard
- provide task-specific instruction to firefighters who may be exposed to fall hazards
- where a fall-arrest system is used, ensure procedures are in place for the prompt rescue of a firefighter following an arrested fall
- for aerial ladders, aerial platforms and other elevating devices, refer to **Guidance Note 4-11, Fall Protection from Elevating Devices**, for device-specific fall-protection considerations

Construction projects

The following applies only when firefighters are performing work on a construction project as defined under the Occupational Health and Safety Act:

If a firefighter on a construction project performing work will be exposed to the hazard of falling and is required by regulation to use certain types of fall protection, the firefighter must complete a working at heights training program approved by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development's Chief Prevention Officer.

You can find out more about [working at heights training](#) on the Ministry of Labour website.

Knowledge of major or unique construction projects in the community may assist firefighters in identifying unique situations that they may encounter at the project and increase their situational awareness.

Applicable regulations and acts

Read:

- [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#)
 - section 1 for definitions of "construction", "project" and "industrial establishment."
 - clause 25(2)(a) for providing information and instruction to a worker
 - clause 25(2)(h) for taking every precaution reasonable to protect workers
- [O. Reg. 213/91 – Regulation for Construction Projects](#)
 - section 26 for hazards where fall protection must be used on a construction project
- [O. Reg. 297/13 – Occupational Health and Safety Awareness and Training Regulation](#)
 - section 6 for when working at heights training is required on construction projects when using one of these methods of fall protection - travel restraint system, fall restricting system, fall arrest system, safety net, work belt, or safety belt
 - section 7 for information on approved working at heights training programs
- [Regulation 851 – Industrial Establishments](#)
 - section 85 for where fall protection must be used at an industrial establishment
- *CSA Z1009:22 – Management of Work at Heights*
- *CSA Z259.12-16 Connecting components for personal fall arrest systems*

Applicable standards

- [NFPA 1850](#) – Standard on Selection, Care, and Maintenance of Protective Ensembles for Structural and Proximity Firefighting and Open-Circuit Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA).
- [NFPA 1970](#) – Standard on Protective Ensembles for Structural and Proximity Firefighting, Work Apparel, Open-Circuit Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) for Emergency Services, and Personal Alert Safety Systems (PASS).

Related

Read firefighter guidance notes:

- [1-5 Life safety rope and equipment](#)
- [4-11 Fall protection from elevating devices](#)

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