

# Falls

By Joseph Hammond



Survey the workplace to determine areas that could result in a fall. Look for areas that are poorly lit, contain slippery surfaces and objects such as hoses, cords and trash. Determine steps to take to control and eliminate these potential causes for falls.

Tell the group that former Ohio State University football coach Woody Hayes, not a fan of a passing game, once stated that three things can result from a pass and two of them are bad.

Much the same can be said of the results from a fall; however, almost all the consequences are bad!

Athletes of most sports, as well as workers in all types of occupations, make an effort to maintain an upright stance. We tend not to accomplish our goals when we take an unplanned spill. More importantly, injuries ranging from a bruised back side to a career-ending disability or even death, may occur. Those of us here would miss your contribution to our organization and the devastation for your family would be immeasurable.

So let's discuss this concern which has happened to us all at some point in our lives.

Divide falls into those that take place on the same level or onto a lower level.

Ask the audience to cite sources of falls on the same level. Encourage them to list the types of incidents that they've witnessed or experienced.

Next, try to list causes for the falls. Answers may include conditions such as:

- Poor lighting;
- Slippery surfaces, wet, oily, icy;
- Hoses, cords, trash, cluttered aisles;
- Granular or powdered material;
- Footwear;
- Uneven surfaces (such as cracks or holes).

Ask for some examples of how falls to a lower level might occur. Answers might include:

- Reaching too far on a ladder;
- Standing on a ladder sliding out from its base;
- Falling from a stairway;
- Falling from a platform or scaffold;
- Falling through floor and roof openings;
- Falling from trucks and trailers;
- Losing your balance while standing on a box or chair;
- Jumping down vs. three-point system. 'Three points' means that both feet and at least one hand, or both hands and at least one foot, are in contact with the ladder, stairway or platform to prevent falling while descending or ascending.

Tell the group that we need to recognize that everyone at our facility can be injured because of a fall. That includes the entire employee population, customers, suppliers, vendors and contractors. Control and elimination of causes for falls should be everyone's mission.

Make every effort to remove objects that can lead to someone's fall whether it involves cleaning up a spill or picking up an item that has been inadvertently dropped.

Ask the group if they understand the difference between fall prevention and fall protection.

Fall-prevention equipment prevents the fall from occurring. Examples include handrails on a stairway, guard railing on a platform and covers over floor holes. Fall prevention also consists of removing hazards that contribute to falls, such as objects placed in aisles or uneven floors.

Fall protection is personal protective equipment which, once a fall takes place, should keep the wearer from striking a lower level. It includes a harness, lanyard and anchor point. Belts are not acceptable except when used as a positioning device or restraint.

For those who need to work on elevated surfaces:

- Use standard guard railing for any work done above 4 feet;
- Maintain and repair bases and railings of portable stairways, ladders and scaffolds;
- Only use scissors lifts with fall-prevention equipment, such as a full body harness and a lanyard connected to a manufacturer's approved anchorage point;
- For other lifts, such as boom lifts, a restraint system is still recommended; but if working above a certain height, fall protection is required;
- Firmly attach lift truck safety cages to the mast, have a solid floor and standard guard railing. Do not perform work outside the railing without using a restraint;
- Order pickers should use the manufacturer's provided equipment and remain within the platform provided. Any deviation will violate company policy.

Conclude by summarizing that maintaining our strong effort on good housekeeping will help prevent slips, trips and falls.

Make sure you realize that you are in control, and that you have a responsibility for preventing falls.

Falls can be prevented with your active participation and involvement. Please take a moment to correct those hazards that you observe. Don't leave it for someone else. Point out those situations that may need supervisory action. Simply put, "Do what's right!"

Finally, let's agree that for the next week, we'll specifically look at our respective work areas and procedures to identify opportunities for improving fall prevention and protection. Come prepared to share your activities when we reconvene.

Examples include:

- Relocated an extension cord so it didn't cross aisle;
- Submitted a work order for lighting a stairwell;
- Removed a pallet from a walkway.

## References

### Regulations

- Ohio Administrative Code 4123:1-5-02, Guarding floor and wall openings and holes
- 29 CFR 1910 Subparts D and E, Occupational Safety and Health Administration

### Books

- Ellis, J. Nigel, Introduction to Fall Protection, 3rd ed., American Society of Safety Engineers, 2001.

### Web sites

- Occupational Safety and Health Administration web pages on fall prevention and protection
  - Walking/Working Surfaces: [www.osha.gov/SLTC/walkingworkingsurfaces/index.html](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/walkingworkingsurfaces/index.html)
  - Fall Protection: [www.osha.gov/SLTC/fallprotection/index.html](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/fallprotection/index.html)
  - Crane, Derrick and Hoist Safety: [www.osha.gov/SLTC/cranehoistsafety/index.html](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/cranehoistsafety/index.html)
  - Scaffolding: [www.osha.gov/SLTC/scaffolding/index.html](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/scaffolding/index.html)
- Falls from Elevations (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health): [www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/falls](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/falls)
- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety web pages on fall prevention
  - Prevention of Slips, Trips and Falls: [www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/safety\\_haz/falls.html](http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/safety_haz/falls.html)
  - Ladders: [www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/safety\\_haz/ladders/](http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/safety_haz/ladders/)
  - Platforms: [www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/safety\\_haz/platforms/](http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/safety_haz/platforms/)

### Videos

BWC's Division of Safety & Hygiene's video library has a number of videos on fall prevention. These are available for loan to Ohio employers. Order a catalog by calling 1-800-OHIOWC (ask for the video library), or visit our Web site, [ohiobwc.com](http://ohiobwc.com).

**Joseph Hammond** is a certified professional environmental auditor and occupational safety and health technologist. After a 27-year career with BWC, Hammond now provides safety training and consulting services to clients throughout Ohio. He is an authorized OSHA 10- and 30-hour course trainer, and makes frequent public presentations to both general industry and construction groups.

We always strive to improve the *Safety Leader's Discussion Guide*. Your feedback can help. Please e-mail your comments to [Safety@ohiobwc.com](mailto:Safety@ohiobwc.com).