

Demolition: Before the First Swing

About 9 minutes to deliver

The engineering survey, the services, and the order things come down in — because a structure being taken apart no longer behaves like the one that was designed.

A finished building carries load in a designed path. Halfway through demolition it does not — and nobody has calculated what it does instead. That is why the rules for demolition start well before anyone picks up a tool.

THE SURVEY COMES FIRST

1926.850(a): before employees start demolition, a competent person makes an engineering survey of the framing, floors and walls, and the possibility of unplanned collapse — including any adjacent structure where people could be exposed. The employer must have written evidence that the survey was done.

If nobody can show you that, the job has not started properly.

Where a structure has been damaged by fire, flood or explosion, walls and floors are shored or braced before anyone works inside it.

SERVICES

1926.850(c): electric, gas, water, steam, sewer and other service lines are shut off, capped or otherwise controlled outside the building line before work begins. Anything that has to stay live is protected and everybody is told which one it is.

Also before the first swing: any tank, drum or pipe that held flammables gets purged and certified, and asbestos and lead surveys are in hand. Those are not paperwork — they decide whether this is a demolition job or a licensed abatement job.

THE ORDER OF WORK

- Top down, in reverse of construction, unless an engineer has designed something else.
- Never undermine a wall. A wall left standing unsupported with the floor gone at its base falls in a direction nobody predicted.
- Watch floor loading. 1926.852 and the debris rules exist because demolition debris piled on a floor is a load that floor was never designed for, and the collapse takes the crew down with it.
- Chutes for debris — enclosed above 20 feet, gates at the discharge, and the area below barricaded with a person attending.
- Openings in floors get covered or railed, the same as anywhere else.

AROUND THE MACHINE

Mechanical demolition has an exclusion zone, and it is bigger than the machine's reach — material falls outward and bounces. Nobody enters it while the machine is working, including to look at something. And the operator stops when anyone crosses the line, no matter who they are.

EVERY DAY

The building changes overnight and after every load comes out. The competent person looks again, and so should you before you walk into a space you left yesterday.

ASK THE CREW

- Has anyone seen the written engineering survey for this structure?
- Which services are confirmed dead, and which are still live?
- Where is the exclusion zone today, and who is enforcing it?

29 CFR 1926.850 · 29 CFR 1926.852 · 29 CFR 1926.859

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ATTENDANCE RECORD

Demolition: Before the First Swing

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Date

Job / site

Delivered by

Company

#	Print name	Signature	Date
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I delivered this talk and determined it was suitable for this crew and this work.

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