

Fall Protection: The Six-Foot Rule

About 10 minutes to deliver

Six feet in construction, and what counts as protection — plus the anchor point most people get wrong.

Falls kill more construction workers than anything else. The rule is simple enough to say in one line: in construction, six feet above a lower level and you need protection.

WHAT COUNTS AS PROTECTION

1926.501(b)(1) gives three options, and any of them satisfies it:

- Guardrails. Top rail about 42 inches, midrail, and a toeboard where anything could fall on someone below.
- Safety nets, rigged as close under the work as practical.
- Personal fall arrest — harness, lanyard, anchor. All three, or you have none of it.

Six feet is the construction trigger. General industry is four. Steel erection, scaffolds and ladders each have their own rules, which is why "what's the height?" is always the wrong first question. The right one is "what am I working on?"

THE ANCHOR IS THE PART PEOPLE GET WRONG

- 5,000 pounds per attached worker, or a system designed by a qualified person with a safety factor of two. A handrail, a conduit run, a piece of duct or a plumbing pipe is not an anchor no matter how solid it feels.
- Above you, not beside you. An anchor at your feet means you fall the full length of the lanyard before it starts working, and the arresting force goes up sharply.
- Do the arithmetic before you clip on. Lanyard length, plus deceleration distance, plus your height, plus sag. Six feet of lanyard on a six-foot anchor does not stop you before the floor.

THE HARNESS

- Snug. Chest strap at mid-chest, leg straps tight enough for a flat hand and no more. A loose harness lets you slide inside it.
- Inspect it before every use. Cuts, fraying, chemical burns, distorted hardware, a deployed shock pack. Any of those and it is out of service.
- A harness that has taken a fall is finished. Tag it and bin it. It did its job once.

RESCUE

If someone hangs in a harness they have minutes, not hours — blood pools in the legs and the rest of the body starts running short. There must be a plan for getting them down that does not begin with calling 911 and waiting.

ASK THE CREW

- What are we tying off to today, and would it hold 5,000 pounds?
- If someone goes over the edge and is hanging, who gets them down and how?
- Is there anywhere on this site over six feet with no guardrail and no anchor?

29 CFR 1926.501 · 29 CFR 1926.502

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ATTENDANCE RECORD

Fall Protection: The Six-Foot Rule

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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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