

To The Point About Scaffolding for Construction Workers

FACT SHEET

LENGTH: 15 MINUTES

PRODUCTION YEAR: 2026

PROGRAM SYNOPSIS:

A construction site is an ever-changing workplace, a workplace full of hazards that can hurt us, make us ill, or kill us. Controlling these hazards and keeping construction workers safe is the point of a safety and health program. Workers who climb onto or perform work on supported scaffolding may be exposed to these types of hazards and must make scaffold safety their number one priority. This program delves into some common pitfalls and mistakes that can happen with scaffolding. Understanding and avoiding these common scaffolding hazards can prevent injuries and save lives.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:

After watching the program, the participant will be able to explain the following:

- Who is qualified to install a scaffolding system;
- The importance of a pre-shift inspection;
- The requirements for decking and planking;
- The elements of a guardrail system;
- How to protect workers from falling debris.

INSTRUCTIONAL CONTENT:

INTRODUCTION

- A construction site is an ever-changing workplace, a workplace full of hazards that can hurt us, make us ill, or kill us. Controlling these hazards and keeping construction workers safe is the point of our organization's safety and health program.
- Workers who climb onto or perform work on supported scaffolding may be exposed to these types of hazards and must make scaffold safety their number one priority.
- Nearly every large construction project involves the use of scaffolding; more specifically, supported scaffolding. Supported scaffolding is temporary in nature, set at ground level, and consists of poles, legs, frames, uprights, and similar support structures used to create built-in levels to increase height.
- A properly constructed scaffold provides workers with a safe and stable elevated working surface, one that provides protection from falling by the presence of guardrails, and a safe means of access by the presence of a securely attached ladder or stair tower.
- However, working on a scaffold can be hazardous. Nearly 4,500 injuries and over 50 deaths occur each year in scaffold-related incidents.
- Some common scaffold pitfalls and mistakes include scaffolds built on unstable foundations, unsecured support structures, decking or planks in poor condition, working surfaces without complete decking, and guardrails that are missing or removed.
- Understanding and avoiding these common scaffolding hazards can prevent injuries and save lives.
- That is the point of our organization's scaffolding safety requirements, and that is the point of this program. So, pay close attention as we get to the point about scaffolding safety for construction workers.

THE COMPETENT PERSON FOR SCAFFOLDING

- Scaffolds are not something that just anyone on the job can throw together as needed. The design of a scaffold requires careful pre-planning by a qualified person to determine the type of scaffolding best suited for the job, the maximum load the scaffold needs to support, the existence of a good foundation, and how to avoid electrical hazards such as overhead power lines.
- Depending on the planned height of the scaffold and its type, a registered professional engineer may be required to design the scaffold. Once designed, the scaffold must be constructed and loaded according to that design under the supervision of a competent person.
- A competent person must oversee the construction of all scaffolds and supervise and provide training to any worker involved in erecting, disassembling, or moving a scaffold.
- According to OSHA, a competent person is an individual designated by the employer who has the knowledge, experience, and authority to identify and address hazards related to scaffolding.

TRAINING

- One of the biggest safety concerns during scaffold construction and dismantling is falling. It is up to the competent person to determine what type of fall protection, if any, is feasible during this process.
- In some instances, the competent person determines that the use of fall protection during this time presents a greater hazard and must not be used. In any event, proper ladder access, decking, and guardrails must be installed on the scaffold as soon as it is feasible to do so.

- Again, workers involved in constructing scaffolds must receive additional specialized training from a competent person. But if you are like most construction workers, you may not be involved in the construction of the scaffold. More likely, you just need to use the scaffold to perform your work. Even so, you must make it a point to do so safely.
- Prior to climbing onto or performing work on a supported scaffold, employees must receive training by a competent person. This scaffold safety training will include how to recognize and control the hazards associated with a specific type of scaffold to be used.

PRE-SHIFT INSPECTION

- One way scaffold hazards are identified and controlled is by performing of a mandatory pre-shift inspection.
- A daily inspection of each scaffold must be performed by a competent person. Some items the competent person is checking for during a scaffold inspection include the following: checking the foundation for stability, ensuring all components are secure (which means braces, platforms, and guardrails are pinned, fastened, or secured properly), verifying that the scaffold is level and properly supported, inspecting scaffold planks and boards for damage, cracks, or excessive wear, and confirming that scaffold inspection tags are up-to-date and accurate.
- The use of scaffold inspection tags is a common method used to document the required daily inspections and communicate to all workers the status of the scaffold.
- A green tag indicates that a scaffold is ready for use. A yellow tag indicates that a scaffold may only be used with extreme caution and only after learning what additional safety measures must be taken. For example, a yellow tag scaffold may require the use of a personal fall arrest system. A red tag indicates that a scaffold is unsafe and may not be used.
- A properly constructed scaffold must have a level, secure foundation. For this reason, a base plate must always be used to support a scaffold pole or frame. A base plate increases stability by distributing the scaffold's load over a wider area.
- In addition, when the surface is not firm or may be unstable, a mudsill must also be used. The mudsill should be secured to the base plate using at least two fasteners, preferably on opposite corners.

SAFE ACCESS

- In addition to being properly constructed, a scaffold must also provide safe access for workers.
- Whenever a scaffold platform is more than two feet above or below the point of access, a ladder, stair tower, or other structure that provides safe access is required.
- Workers must never climb the cross braces or other support structures to access a scaffold.
- Ladders must be securely affixed to the scaffold, and the first rung must be no more than 24 inches from the supporting level. In addition, the ladder must extend three feet above the working level of the scaffold.
- When climbing or descending a scaffold ladder, always maintain three points of contact. This means two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand must remain in contact with the ladder.
- Do not carry tools or supplies in your hands while climbing. Also, do not climb onto or work from a scaffold when snow or ice are present or during the presence of storms or high winds.

SCAFFOLD PLANKING OR DECKING

- Even after workers have safely reached the working level of a scaffold, falling remains the greatest hazard. There are two areas of most concern when it comes to preventing falls from a scaffold: the working surface, or decking, and the guardrails.
- Any level of a scaffold on which work is being performed must be fully decked with planking or fabricated decks designed for this purpose.
- Scaffold planking or decking must be able to support four times the intended load of the scaffold, which is the combined weight of all personnel, equipment, and any other items that will be on the scaffold at the same time.
- Typically, a scaffold's decking must have no gaps larger than one inch between adjacent units, or between the platform and uprights.
- When planks are used to create the scaffold's deck, they must be made of scaffold-grade lumber and be in good condition. Planks 10 feet or less must extend beyond the support at least 6 inches, but no more than 12 inches, while planks longer than 10 feet may extend as much as 18 inches beyond the support.
- When planks overlap, they must only do so over a support and be overlapped by at least 12 inches.
- Fabricated scaffold decking or planks that do not extend beyond the support by at least 6 inches must be secured by other means. This type of decking is typically secured to the frame by hooks that prevent movement. Make it a point to ensure that the scaffold level on which you intend to work is fully and properly decked.

GUARDRAIL SYSTEMS

- Of course, it's not enough to just have a secure deck on which to work. Employers must provide all workers on a supported scaffold 10 feet tall or more with some type of fall protection. This fall protection can include guardrail systems, personal fall arrest systems, or both.
- Guardrail systems are the most common form of scaffold fall protection and consist of a toprail and a midrail placed on all open sides and ends of the platform at the working level.

- The toprail must be placed between 38 and 45 inches above the working surface and be strong enough to withstand a force of at least 200 pounds applied in any downward or horizontal dimension.
- The midrail should be installed halfway between the toprail and the working surface. Midrails must be strong enough to withstand a force of at least 150 pounds applied in any downward or horizontal dimension.
- In some instances, when the intersection of the cross brace occurs at an appropriate height, the competent person may determine that the cross brace itself may be used as either the toprail or midrail, but not both.
- Cross braces alone can never be used as a complete guardrail system. An additional guardrail, which complies with OSHA's height and strength requirements, must also be installed. Make it a point to never work from a scaffold unless the appropriate fall protection is in place.
- Areas where materials are loaded and unloaded onto a scaffold must also have a guardrail system around all open edges. If these guardrails are opened or removed during material handling operations, then workers near the unprotected edge must wear a personal fall arrest system connected to an approved anchor point.
- Also, make it a point not to stand on boxes, buckets, ladders, or other items to elevate yourself while working on a scaffold.
- Keep your feet flat on the deck when working from a scaffold.

EXCEPTIONS

- There are a few exceptions to the requirements for guardrails on the working level of a scaffold.
- Guardrails are not required on the open edge of a scaffold when it is within 14 inches or less from a solid surface. This exception is often utilized by masonry workers as they construct vertical walls.
- Guardrails are not required while a scaffold is being assembled or disassembled. And guardrails are not required on scaffolds less than 10 feet in height.
- Of course, best practice would be to install guardrails at the working level of all scaffolds regardless of height. Even a 5-foot fall from a scaffold deck could be fatal.

PROTECTING WORKERS FROM FALLING OBJECTS

- Next, let's talk about protecting workers below a scaffold from falling tools or debris.
- Scaffold toeboards are required when there is a danger of items falling from the scaffold. Toeboards must be 3 1/2 inches tall and capable of withstanding a force of 50 pounds in any direction.
- Ideally, there should be no gap between the bottom of the toeboard and the working surface. If there is a gap, it must be no more than a quarter inch.
- An alternative to the use of toeboards is to restrict access to the area under a scaffold with a barricade. Do not cross under a barricaded scaffold due to the risk of falling objects.
- Be aware that many jobsites require tool lanyards be used to prevent tools from falling onto workers below while climbing or working.
- In certain situations, such as when a scaffold's height exceeds 25 feet, or when there is a general access point that passes under a scaffold, additional debris screens or netting may be required to be installed between the toeboard and toprail.
- And of course, making it a point to practice good housekeeping while on a scaffold is always a good idea. Keep the scaffold platform clear of excess tools, debris, trash, or loose materials that could create tripping hazards or damage the structure.

CONCLUSION

- In this program, we have pointed out some of the most common hazards related to scaffolding, and how those hazards can be controlled through safe work practices, training, and oversight by a competent person.
- Make it a point to keep safety your highest priority any time you step foot onto a scaffold. You may not be the designated competent person responsible for a scaffold's safety, but you are the person most responsible for your own safety. Use the information presented in this program to make sure any scaffold you plan to access is safe and secure.
- After all, preventing injuries is the point of our safety and health program, which is why you must always make it a point to be safe.

TO THE POINT ABOUT SCAFFOLDING FOR CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

ANSWERS TO THE REVIEW QUIZ

1. a

2. a

3. b

4. a

5. b

6. a

7. a

8. a

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REVIEW QUIZ

The following questions are provided to determine how well you understand the information presented in this program.

Name _____ Date _____

1. The design of a scaffold requires careful pre-planning by a qualified person to determine the type of scaffolding best suited for the job.
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. Prior to climbing onto or performing work on a supported scaffold, employees must receive training by a competent person.
 - a. True
 - b. False
3. A green tag indicates that a scaffold is unsafe and may not be used.
 - a. True
 - b. False
4. Ladders must be securely affixed to the scaffold, and the first rung must be no more than 24 inches from the supporting level.
 - a. True
 - b. False
5. Scaffold planking or decking must be able to support two times the intended load of the scaffold.
 - a. True
 - b. False
6. Guardrail systems are the most common form of scaffold fall protection and consist of a toprail and a midrail placed on all open sides and ends of the platform at the working level.
 - a. True
 - b. False
7. Guardrails are not required while a scaffold is being assembled or disassembled.
 - a. True
 - b. False
8. Toeboards must be 3 1/2 inches tall and capable of withstanding a force of 50 pounds in any direction.
 - a. True
 - b. False