

TOOLBOX TALK #39

TYING OFF LADDERS

The question many construction workers have is, “Do I have to be tied off when working from a ladder?” The quick answer is no, but we need to explain. The OSHA standard for construction requires workers to use fall protection with an unprotected edge that is six feet above a lower level. This protection can be provided by a guardrail, safety net or personal fall protection system. This standard is silent when workers are working from portable ladders.



Portable ladders (extension, A-frame, or stepladder) are free-standing. If a worker is tied off to a free-standing ladder and falls, the ladder would fall with the worker and potentially cause more injury. Even if the ladder is properly tied off and staked at the base, the ladder is not an approved anchor point. If an approved anchor point is above the worker using a ladder, it would be considered a best practice – but not required – to use fall protection while climbing.

Although not required by OSHA standards, some companies' safety policies require fall protection while working from a portable ladder. If that is the case, OSHA would require workers to follow that rule, even if the requirements are greater than OSHA's.

Remember: Even the best personal fall protection harness and lanyard are only as strong as the anchor point. If a certified anchor point is available, make sure it does not require extra exposure or danger to attach to it. In other words, a worker should not climb 20 feet so that he/she could tie off when they would be working at only 6 feet.

New portable ladders on the market provide an engineered guardrail at the top of the ladder. Safety cages are fixed or adjustable fiberglass platform ladders with a built in 42-inch guardrail. Instead of trying to find anchor points everywhere, just use a safety cage with a guardrail to comply with tie off rules.