

TOOLBOX TALK #33

FALLS FROM HEIGHT

Workers falling from elevated work sites is the primary cause of fatalities in the construction industry. In a study by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) that spanned 5

years of data, falls to lower level fatalities accounted for about 13% of all fatalities occurring in all industries during the period. In the construction industry, falls to lower levels accounted for 37% of all construction related fatalities.



roofer fall fatality rates. In fact, roofers have a more than 5 times chance of dying than a normal construction worker.

Roofers are a high risk work group. The overall fatality rates for all construction occupations pales in comparison to

Actual circumstances of what causes a worker to fall are not typically noted in an incident report or in the fatality databases. Most assuredly, however, a loss of balance always precedes a fall. Typically, this loss of balance is caused by a person slipping or tripping. What happens after a person falls has not been well-documented. Depending on the slope of the roof, a worker may not slide fall or may slide to the eave. In those instances, installation of a slide guard constructed with a combination of 2x6 and 2x4 lumber which is a common construction practice, may help prevent a sliding worker from falling off the roof.

Some contractors use a commercially available roofing bracket, also referred to as a “roof jack”, to create a flat walking/working surface at the eave. This provides not only slide protection but also a flat, stable working surface. Others use a combination of 2x4 and 2x6 construction at the edge which serves as slide protection but also something to brace against while working on the roof. Both systems are secured to the trusses/rafters with nails. The slide guard is repositioned as roofing work progresses up the roof. Additional slide guards can be added at regular intervals.

It used to be accepted practice to use slide guards alone for fall protection. Not anymore. Slide guards should be used in conjunction with other basic fall protection systems. The most common of these are guardrails and personal fall arrest systems.