

### Working at Heights

Working at heights may be common for many employees, however some may only periodically work at heights or never at all. It is important that you understand the potential fall hazards in your work area and that a fall, even from a short distance, can cause serious injury or death if proper precautions are not taken. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires fall protection for all employees that are exposed to fall hazards 4-feet or greater in height. Such examples of work areas that may have fall hazards are rooftops, skylights, unprotected ramps and runways, equipment hoisting areas, loading docks, unprotected wall or floor openings, stairways, excavations, pits, and catwalks.

#### Statistics

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), there were 615 fatal falls to lower levels in 2018, 65% of which were workers 45 years of age or older. The most common fatal falls occurred from ladders and rooftops. Here at Northwestern, there were 4 fall injuries from ladders in 2018.

#### Reducing fall hazard exposures

Risk Management is actively conducting fall hazard assessments and providing guidance to our campus partners to address fall hazards. In addition, Risk Management provides online and in-person training opportunities to increase employee fall hazard awareness.

#### Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

**Preparation is Key:** Keep the topic relevant. Work with your team to review potential fall hazard exposures in your workplace and discuss how they can be avoided.

**Stay Positive:** Keep the focus on what can be done to create a safe workplace, instead of focusing on what has gone wrong in the past.

**Share a Story, Ask for a Story:** Storytelling is a powerful method to convey information. Stories from your employees make the topic even more relatable.

#### *Be safe in the air, take extra care!*

Below are methods to keep yourself safe from fall hazards while working at heights:

- ❖ Identify all potential fall hazards and falling object hazards before your work begins to ensure protective measures are in place.
- ❖ If possible, avoid working at heights! Eliminate fall hazards by carrying out tasks on ground level or use extension tools instead of working from a ladder.
- ❖ Permanent and portable guardrails provide effective fall protection from fall hazards when working on catwalks and near roof edges or openings, such as steam vault access hatches.
- ❖ Mobile elevated work platforms, such as scissor lifts (pictured right), elevate you up to a work area not easily accessible while also providing fall protection. It is important to select the correct type of lift for the task at hand and to evaluate the work area before use. You must be trained and authorized prior to operating a mobile elevated work platform.
- ❖ Scaffolds provide a safe temporary work platform at heights and offer protection against fall hazards with guardrails. Ensure that scaffolds are erected and inspected by a competent person.
- ❖ Personal protective equipment (PPE), such as a body harness, is your last line of defense against fall hazards when guardrails, mobile elevated work platforms, or scaffolds are unavailable. All personal fall protection equipment must be inspected and you must be trained before use.
- ❖ Items such as tools, equipment, and materials falling from heights can cause serious injury or death to people below. Ensure items can't fall by using toeboards or screens on elevated work surfaces or barricade areas below to keep people out of the drop zone.



**Report all injuries** on the Risk Management [website](#) or call 847.491.5582.

**Learn more:** Complete [Slips, Trips, and Falls](#) and [Ladder Safety](#) training.

### Safety at Home

March is [National Ladder Safety Month](#) and also a time when we start preparing for spring cleaning at home. Many activities, such as cleaning, painting, and replacing light bulbs, require the use of a portable ladder. Below are some tips to keep yourself safe while working from a ladder:

- ✓ If possible, avoid working at heights (e.g., use a pole light bulb changer instead of a portable ladder to change light bulbs).
- ✓ Select the correct ladder for the task at hand and never use a self-supporting ladder as a single ladder or in a partially closed position.
- ✓ Always face the portable ladder and maintain 3-points of contact while climbing up or down; do not carry objects that could cause you to lose balance and fall.

### For Additional Information

Contact Gwen Butler, Director, Environmental Health & Safety, at 847.491.4936.

*Do you or your team have a safety story you'd like to share? Contact Risk Management at [gwen.butler@northwestern.edu](mailto:gwen.butler@northwestern.edu) for details.*