

Historically, falls are the leading cause of fatalities in construction, accounting for about one-third of all fatalities in the industry. For example, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that there were **713 fatal falls to a lower level in 2017**, out of 887 total fall related fatalities.

This week there is an [emphasis on fall protection nationally](#).

Many companies held special fall protection safety meetings, and trainings on jobsites.

To keep that focus at the front of our minds let's review information regarding [fall protection in Washington State](#).

Incidents involving falls are generally complex events, frequently involving a variety of factors. Consequently, the standards for fall protection deals with both the human and equipment-related issues in protecting workers from fall hazards.

**When do I need fall protection?**

In Washington State, generally, fall protection is required at 4 feet in construction. There are exceptions to the 4-foot fall protection rule, but it depends on the task that you are performing and what your fall height exposure is.

- 0 feet** - regardless of height if exposed to an impalement hazard or dangerous equipment
- 4 feet** – on all walking work surfaces
- 10 feet** – non-walking working surfaces or roofing work on low pitches (task) or leading-edge work (advancing of decking) – **requires** [a fall protection work plan](#) – must be on the project site

**What is fall protection?**

Fall protection is fall restraint and/or fall arrest.

**What is Fall Restraint?**

Fall restraint prevents exposure to a fall.

**Examples:**

Guardrails, hole covers, warning lines or personal fall restraint systems.

Each fall restraint system must be installed correctly and evaluated by a [competent person](#).

Fall restraint is the most effective system to use but may not always be applicable in each case.

Therefore, the second type of fall protection is fall arrest.

**What is fall Arrest?**

Fall arrest is different from fall restraint. Fall arrest will keep you from hitting a lower surface when working from height. i.e., if you were to fall and the only thing between you and ground below is gravity, then, fall arrest must be used to keep you from hitting the surface below.

Your fall arrest system could include an anchorage, a full body harness with either a fall protection shock lanyard or a shock absorbing retractable device.

So, if I need fall protection, how do I determine what type of fall protection will I used?

1. You must evaluate the task you will be performing and what safety protection is needed and required.
2. If I use either Fall Arrest or Fall Restraint, what would provide the best protection?
3. What other requirements must I consider?
  - a. You must follow your company's policies and requirements
  - b. A competent person must be used to determine what anchor points will used for personal fall arrest/restraint
  - c. A fall protection plan must be filled out and at the jobsite if your fall exposures exceeds 10 feet
  - d. Workers **must** be trained by a competent person in the installation, use and dismantling of fall protection systems
  - e. Install your fall protection systems as required by the manufacturer

If you are unsure of what type of fall protection you should use, talk to your supervisor, foremen and/or safety professional. **Never guess!!**

Look out for yourself, co-worker and others.

If it looks wrong, it probably is.

It is never wrong to ask a question such as "Is this safe?" or "What is our fall protection plan?".

No one should ever fall from elevation, there are very good systems available to keep you safe and from hitting the surface below.

Let's be safe out there!!