



When we talk about fall prevention, the focus is usually on the individuals working from heights. However, a similar concept applies to the tools those workers use.

For example, in this 2014 story out of New Jersey: A delivery truck driver lost his life during a stop at a construction site when a tape measure—dropped from 50 stories above the ground—struck him in the head. Reports indicate the tape measure fell some 500 feet at speeds reaching 140 miles per hour.

What your employees need to know

Employers must provide suitable protection for those working from heights and below an elevated workspace.

Like a worker’s fall protection, tethering a tool involves using a rope or lanyard to connect the tool to an anchor point. Then, should the worker accidentally drop the tool, it only falls a few inches and not to the ground. This dramatically reduces the risk the tool will strike anyone who happens to be below the elevated workspace. In addition, the employee who dropped the tool can easily retrieve it and resume work. Otherwise, even if the tool hadn’t hit anyone, the employee who dropped it either must stop work and locate a replacement or head to ground level to retrieve the original.

What your employees need to do

Before work begins, evaluate tools for potential fall or drop hazards. Then take a lanyard with the appropriate clips and connect one end to the tool and the other to a tool belt, wrist band, scaffolding, or different nearby structures. Some tools may have a loop attached to the handle or incorporated into the tool to clip the lanyard. For those that don’t, your workers can use wrap tape or heat shrinking devices to make the tools ready for tethering.

Workers should avoid connecting tools weighing more than five pounds to their tool belt or wristband. The excess weight could affect their balance and add to the injury risk while working from heights. It’s best to tether heavier tools to the structure, scaffolding, or aerial lift unit.

At your safety meeting

Demonstrate to your employees how to properly secure tools. If you need to use the shrinking or taping options referenced above, make sure you have the products on hand to show your employees how to use them.

Also, discuss whether your employees want to attach the tools to their tool belt, use a wrist band, or tether them to a nearby structure. Stress the five-pound rule referenced above and why they need to attach heavier tools to a structure.

And remind your workers of what can happen if tools fall to the ground and that accidents like the one in New Jersey are preventable with the proper precautions.