The Basics of Scaffold Safety

Every year in the United States, about 60 workers die in falls from scaffolds. Many of these deaths can be prevented by proper set-up and use of scaffolding.

Scaffolds provide a safe and efficient way to work off the ground in construction, renovation, masonry, painting and other work.

**The exact specifications for scaffold design vary somewhat from one region to the next and from one use to the next. The following are general safety guidelines:**

- Provide safe means of access and egress, such as a ladder, stairway, stair tower, ramp or walkway.
- Build with scaffold grade lumber.
- Leave wood planks unpainted so any cracks will show.
- Place the scaffold on a firm foundation. Never set up a scaffold on unsafe unstable footings such as barrels, boxes or loose concrete blocks.
- Brace uprights to keep them vertical and to prevent swaying.
- Install guardrails to prevent falls from scaffolds 10 feet (three meters) or higher.
- Install toeboards to stop things from falling off scaffolds 10 feet (or three meters) or higher.
- Make sure the scaffold is capable of supporting four times the maximum intended load, including its own weight.
- A scaffold showing signs of damage or defects must be removed from service immediately until it is effectively repaired.
- Never move a rolling scaffold while someone is on it.
- A qualified person must design the scaffold. A competent person must also inspect the scaffold before each work shift, and after anything happens that could affect the structure.

You must keep the scaffold a certain safe distance from any power line. Check with your local electrical utility company for the established limits of approach, often 10 feet (three meters). Many workers have died of electrocution when they – or the scaffolds they were touching – contacted power lines.

You must not work on a scaffold in high winds or a storm. You must not work on a scaffold with ice or snow on it – except to remove the snow or ice safely.

**Scaffold work takes training.** You need to understand the electrical and fall hazards, as well as the hazards of falling objects in the work areas. You need to know how to use a scaffold properly and how to handle materials safely while you are aloft. Use of fall protection equipment is also an important part of your training. Before you are assigned to assemble, take apart, move, operate, repair or maintain or inspect a scaffold, you need instruction from an experienced person.

You might not use scaffolds at work, but you could deal with them off the job during home renovation and maintenance. When you work off the ground, use a proper ladder or scaffold made for the job. Get
information about safe use of climbing devices from your worker compensation or safety authority, or from the rental agency. Don’t settle for a makeshift platform that could send you on a fatal fall.
Going out on a ledge,
Let proper scaffolding be your safety edge.