



Walk This Way.

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A headline from Racine, WI, April 3, 2017:
“Man airlifted after fall at auto body shop. A man was airlifted to a regional hospital after he reportedly fell off a ladder at a nearby auto body shop and suffered a traumatic injury.” – JournalTimes.com

We don't know anything about that Wisconsin injury. But it's hardly the first serious injury from falls in auto shops.

You probably give little thought to how people can fall in your shop. It isn't the most obvious hazard in automotive repair – but it's a surprisingly common cause of injuries. Think about it. Does anyone use a ladder? What about a small scaffold? Does your roof have exhaust fans or air handlers that need servicing? Ever have wet floors, from snow melt or from washing cars?

OSHA recently did a major revision of a group of standards, Walking-Working Surfaces, which address the situations that result in falls. The new standards cover a lot of ground, but the requirements are pretty straightforward.

Keep floors in good shape. Try to keep them dry. In wet areas, provide drainage and mats, so people aren't slipping and sliding.

If employees need to use ladders, the ladders have to be in good condition and suitable for the job. Check their condition before each use. They must be used correctly – the climber needs to face forward and keep three points of contact, always having at least one hand on the ladder when climbing. Don't let employees use ladders when carrying anything that could cause a loss of balance, such as large, heavy or bulky items. If you've been storing bumpers on a mezzanine accessible only by ladder, you need to stop the practice or find some way to get those bumpers to the ground other than carrying them.

OSHA doesn't discourage the use of ladders. But we caution that ladders make poor work surfaces. Rolling ladder stands or small scaffolds are much easier to work from.

If you use the small rolling scaffold we see in a lot of shops, it has to be kept in good condition. You can't mix and match parts from different manufacturers, unless you have proof that the hybrid will be structurally sound. Inspect it before each use. Don't use a ladder on a scaffold. Lock the casters in place before anyone climbs on it. Guard rails on these small scaffolds aren't mandatory, but they are a good idea.

Have you added a storage mezzanine to your shop? Do people need to go on it? If you have an unprotected edge with a drop of four feet or more, you either need to prohibit anyone from going up there, or you need to put in some fall protection. The easiest type of fall protection: guard rails. You can build them yourself out of construction lumber or purchase guard rail systems. Include a gate that's easy to swing aside.

If you decide to build your own guardrails, make sure they meet the requirements: the top edge needs to be about 42 inches high (plus or minus 3 inches). Put a midrail halfway between the top and the bottom, or use screen or mesh – something to block the opening. Include a toeboard, if there's any chance of objects falling off. Make sure the railing is sturdy enough to handle 200 pounds of force.

If you don't want to or can't install guard rails on your overhead storage area, figure out how else you're going to protect someone who climbs up there. You can use safety nets or personal fall protection systems, but those are usually more of a nuisance than guard rails.

Think about how people get onto that storage mezzanine. If you have a ladder attached to the side, it needs to meet certain design requirements. You need to extend the siderails 42 inches above the mezzanine, so people have something to hold onto as they step up. The ladder itself needs to have sufficient space for both hands and feet.

What if you have a repair pit? It isn't practical to put guard rails up around that, because you couldn't drive cars over it. As long as it isn't deeper than ten feet, you can mark the floor, six feet out, and post signs to warn people of the opening. Then allow only authorized employees within that six feet area.

Do you ever go onto the roof? If anyone needs to work within six feet of the edge, fall protection is needed. You don't need guardrails around the entire roof, only in the area where people need to work. As with mezzanine, if you don't want to use guardrails, your options are safety nets or having people wear harnesses and lanyards, to stop their falls or to keep them away from the edge.

If people need to be within 15 feet of the edge, installing guardrails makes sense – but if the work is rarely done, you can, instead, designate the working area by putting up readily visible warning lines at least six feet from the edge. If you're lucky enough to have roof access from the center of your building and all your equipment is in the center, more than 15 feet from the edge, no fall protection is needed. But you need to make sure employees know they need to stay in the center.

Slips and falls, whether at the same level or to a lower level, are expensive. They cost a lot, not just for medical care and workers' compensation, but in the impact they can have on people's lives. Where could people fall in your shop? Think about it, then take steps to prevent those falls.

This article is intended to provide general information (no advice) about current safety topics. To discuss your specific concerns and how CHESS may help, please contact CHESS at 651-481-9787 or chess@chess-safety.com

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