

Mandate for Safety: Understanding Fall Protection in Alberta

Falls from height remain a leading cause of serious injury and death in workplaces across Canada. In Alberta, the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Code, Part 9, establishes clear, legally binding requirements to protect workers. Adhering to these regulations is a critical responsibility for employers and workers alike, ensuring everyone goes home safe at the end of the day.

When is Fall Protection Required?

Alberta's OHS Code mandates that employers and supervisors must ensure workers are protected from falling in several specific scenarios:

- **Height of 3 Metres (approximately 10 feet) or More:** Protection is required at any temporary or permanent work area where a worker might fall a vertical distance of 3 metres or more.
- **Unusual Possibility of Injury:** Fall protection is required for falls of less than 3 metres if the surface below poses a greater risk of injury than a flat, solid surface (e.g., machinery, open tanks of hazardous materials, or water).
- **Permanent Work Areas (1.2m to 3m):** At permanent work areas, fall protection (usually a guardrail) is required for falls of more than 1.2 metres and less than 3 metres.
- **Openings:** A worker must be protected from falling through any opening in a work surface.

The Hierarchy of Controls

The Alberta OHS Code establishes a clear hierarchy of preferred fall protection methods, emphasizing prevention over mitigation:

1. **Guardrails:** The first choice for fall protection, as they are a collective safety measure that protects all workers in the area without requiring individual action.
2. **Travel Restraint Systems:** If guardrails are not reasonably practicable, a travel restraint system (which physically prevents a worker from reaching an unguarded edge) must be used.

3. **Personal Fall Arrest Systems (PFAS):** If travel restraint is also not practicable, a PFAS (which stops a fall after it occurs) is the next option.
4. **Equally Effective Controls:** Only if none of the above are reasonably practicable can an employer use other equally effective safety controls.

The Essential Fall Protection Plan

For any work at a height of 3 metres or more where guardrails are not used, the employer must develop a site-specific **Fall Protection Plan**. This plan is a critical safety document that must be available at the worksite and reviewed with all affected workers before work begins.

The plan must include:

- Identification of all fall hazards.
- The specific fall protection system to be used.
- The anchors to be used (which must have a minimum breaking strength of 16 kN per worker).
- Confirmation of sufficient clearance distances below the work area to prevent a worker from hitting the ground or any objects during a fall.
- Detailed rescue procedures in the event a worker falls and is suspended.
Contacting emergency services alone is not considered a sufficient rescue plan.

Training and Equipment Standards

Workers must receive comprehensive training in the safe use of fall protection systems, including hands-on practice in fitting and inspecting equipment. All equipment, such as full-body harnesses, lanyards, and self-retracting devices, must meet recognized safety standards (e.g., CSA, ANSI, CEN). Equipment that has arrested a fall or is found to be defective must be immediately removed from service.

By strictly following these regulations and prioritizing proactive safety planning and training, Alberta workplaces can drastically reduce the risk of fall-related injuries and fatalities. The full text of the OHS Code, Part 9, is available online via the [Government of Alberta](#) website.