

Suspended equipment safety in construction

Safe At Work Ontario
Enforcement > Compliance > Partnership >



Improper use of access equipment on construction projects continues to cause workplace injuries in Ontario. The use of suspended equipment may put workers at risk when the equipment is not adequately used, maintained or stored, or when workers are not properly trained on its installation and operation, or when manufacturer's instructions are not followed and equipment limitations are not respected.

Some general duties of workplace parties

Employers

Employers' obligations under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) and the Construction Projects Regulation include, but are not limited to:

- ensuring workers are adequately trained in the use of fall protection systems at Ontario construction sites.[O. Reg. 213/91, section 26.2]
- appointing a competent person as a supervisor [OHSA clause 25(2)(c)]
- taking every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker [OHSA clause 25(2)(h)].

An employer with six or more workers must also:

- prepare an occupational health and safety policy
- review that policy at least once a year
- set up a program to implement it [clause 25(2)(j)], and
- post, in a conspicuous place, a copy of the occupational health and safety policy [OHSA clause 25(2)(k)].

Supervisors

Supervisors' duties under the OHSA include, but are not limited to:

- ensuring workers work in compliance with the act and regulations, using protective devices, measures and procedures required by the OHSA and regulations [clause 27(1)(a)]
- taking every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of workers [clause 27(2)(c)].

Workers

Workers' duties under the OHSA include, but are not limited to:

- working in compliance with the act and regulations, using protective devices, equipment and clothing that their employer requires them to use [subsection 28(1)], and
- not using or operating any equipment, machine, device or thing or working in a manner that may endanger themselves or any other worker [clause 28(2)(b)].

Protecting workers

All workplace parties — employers, supervisors and workers — are responsible for ensuring compliance with the provisions of the OHSA and prescribed regulations. There are many factors to consider for the safe use of suspended equipment on construction projects.

Obligations under the OHSA and the Construction Projects Regulation

- Suspended platforms must be adequately designed as required by O. Reg. 213/91, sections 134 and 139.
- Inspection by a professional engineer may be required before a suspended scaffold is used for the first time [O. Reg. 213/91, subsection 139(5)] to assess factors such as:
 - the suitability and adequacy of the anchor points, of the structure bearing the counterweights and the outrigger beams or clamps [O. Reg. 213/91, sections 31 and 137]
 - the adequacy of the hoisting and rigging components, maintenance and daily inspection requirements for the system set up and the suspended stage [O. Reg. 213/91, sections 137 and 93], and
 - the suitability of communication between the workers on the suspended equipment and others on the ground [O. Reg. 213/91, section 18].
- Safe distance must be maintained from energized electrical equipment and overhead power lines [O. Reg. 213/91, sections 187 and 188].
- Workers need to be aware of the written emergency procedures in place (required to be established by the constructor) at the project in the event of an accident [O. Reg. 213/91, section 17].
- Employers must ensure that personal protective equipment (PPE) needed for the job is used by workers and maintained in good condition. The PPE must comply with applicable standards. The employer must ensure that the PPE is used, maintained and stored according to manufacturer's instructions, applicable standards, and legislated requirements. The workers must be adequately trained on the use of the PPE [O. Reg. 213/91, sections 21, 26 and 93] and must have proof of this training.
- Workers need to know who is in charge of the operation — supervisor? “competent person”¹? [O. Reg. 213/91, section 14].

Health and safety considerations and best practices

Here are some of the many factors to consider for the safe use of suspended equipment on construction projects:

- Has specific training been provided to address identified hazards while using the suspended equipment, including training on fall protection, material handling, Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS), training in proper installation and use of the equipment, etc.?
- Are there precautions in place to protect workers on the ground from material falling from the suspended platform?
- Have any hazardous chemical and other toxic substances been identified, and are there engineering controls and other safety measures in place to deal with them?
- Has proper mechanical equipment been provided for material handling to reduce the risk of overexertion or musculoskeletal disorders? (Consider work positioning, lifting devices, etc.)
- All workers, including young workers and workers new to the job, must be adequately trained and properly supervised.
- Specific work-related hazards must be analyzed and relevant controls established (e.g., fall hazards or potential contact with energized conductors).

¹ The OHSA defines a “competent person” as:

- having the knowledge, training and experience to organize the work
- being familiar with the OHSA and the Construction Regulation, and
- being able to identify existing and potential health and safety hazards and/or unsafe working conditions.

More information about safety on construction projects

- Ministry of Labour, construction safety: <http://www.ontario.ca/ConstructionSafety>
- Infrastructure Health & Safety Association: <http://www.ihsa.ca>
- Workplace Safety & Insurance Board: <http://www.wsib.on.ca>
- CSA standards (view only) referenced in occupational health and safety legislation: <http://ohsviewaccess.csa.ca>
- Multi-point suspended scaffolds (MPSS) guidelines and regulations: www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/pubs/scaffolds/index.php

Call toll-free

Call 1-877-202-0008 anytime to report workplace health and safety incidents or for general inquiries about health and safety at the workplace.

Note: *This document does not constitute legal advice and has no legal effect.*

To determine your rights and obligations under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) and its regulations, please contact your legal counsel or refer to the legislation at http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90o01_e.htm.