

Safety Alert

Helping employers prevent workplace deaths

Massachusetts Department of Public Health



Occupational Health Surveillance Program, Spring 2026

The purpose of this Safety Alert is to: 1) Highlight an industry's occupational health risks; 2) Share case studies of recent occupational fatalities; and 3) Provide guidance on how to prevent similar incidents.

Protecting Workers From Falls While Using Scaffolding

Background

Falls are the leading cause of death in the construction industry. In the United States in 2024, 36.1% (or 373) of all deaths in the construction industry were due to falls to a lower level.¹ In Massachusetts, 14 workers died from falls to a lower level in 2024, and nine of these were in the construction industry. Although roofing work leads in fatal falls within the construction industry (both nationally and in Massachusetts), these fatalities happen in all areas of construction work, such as framing, painting, electrical and masonry work. In the United States in 2023, there were 62 fatal falls involving scaffolding. Over the last 10 years, Massachusetts has lost 16 workers to falls from scaffolds. All these fatal falls can be prevented with adequate fall protection systems in place.



Construction worker on scaffold with fall protection
(Photo via Shutterstock)

Recent Fatality Case Story

On August 9, 2024, a laborer was assisting with the removal of scaffolding from the exterior of a historic theater on the final day of a masonry restoration project. The laborer was removing screen netting from the top level of the pipe scaffold. Because this was the final day of work, the horizontal guardrails on the scaffolding level had already been disconnected. His fall protection harness was not clipped to the horizontal lifeline at the time of the incident. The laborer fell approximately 50 feet and suffered fatal injuries.

¹ Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, [Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries](#).

How can employers protect workers who use scaffolds?

Plan	Provide	Train
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Implement a fall protection plan for the jobsite.▶ As required by OSHA standard 29 CFR 1926.451(f)(7), plan for a competent person qualified in scaffold erection, moving, dismantling, or alteration to be at the jobsite to oversee the assembly and dismantling of scaffold systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Provide proper personal protective equipment (PPE) and personal fall protection equipment to workers.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure all workers use fall protection equipment and that their harnesses are appropriately anchored.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Train your workers on fall protection and how to work safely at heights.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure all workers are trained on the specific scaffolding systems and fall protection devices they will be using. These tools will not be the same at every jobsite.

More Information

CPWR – The Center for Construction Research and Training

- [Scaffolds: Tips for Safe Work \(Hazard Alert\)](#)
- [Stop Construction Falls](#)
 - [Written Fall Prevention Plans](#)
 - [Resources on Selecting Equipment and Personal Protective Equipment](#)
 - [Falls Training Resources](#)
 - [Resources in Spanish](#)

Occupational Safety and Health Administration

- [OSHA Standard 29 CFR 1926.451: General Requirements on Scaffolds](#)
- [Scaffolding eTool](#)

American National Standards Institute

- [ANSI A10.8 Scaffolding Safety Requirements](#)

Massachusetts Department of Public Health

- [Fall prevention for construction workers resources](#) (Available in Spanish, Portuguese, and Haitian Creole)
- [Personal Fall Arrest Systems \(PFAS\) for Residential Construction Contractors](#)
- [Scaffold Safety for Residential Construction Contractors](#)

On-site Consultation Program for Massachusetts Employers:

If you need help starting a health and safety program, find resources from the [Massachusetts Department of Labor Standards](#).



This narrative was developed to alert employers to a tragic incident and was developed by the MA State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation[™] (FACE) program in the Occupational Health Surveillance Program (OHSP) at the MA Department of Public Health. The MA State FACE program is supported by funding from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). The “FACE” and “FATALITY ASSESSMENT AND CONTROL EVALUATION” wordmarks are trademarks of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Use of these marks does not imply endorsement by HHS. This report is the product of NIOSH’s Cooperative State partner. The findings and conclusions in each report are those of the individual Cooperative State partner and do not necessarily reflect the views or policy of NIOSH.

For more information, [visit OHSP’s Fatal Work-related Injuries webpage](#) Please email MA.FACE@mass.gov if you have any questions.

Do you have feedback about this Safety Alert? The FACE program welcomes feedback on the usefulness of our communications products and how to improve them. To submit feedback, [please click here to fill out our evaluation form](#) or scan this QR code:



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