

Fall Prevention: Verify the Controls

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Why this matters

Fall protection can appear complete while an opening remains unprotected or an arrest system cannot stop a fall before a lower level. Before exposure, verify the protection for the actual location and work method.

Objective: Identify the fall exposure and confirm the protection needed for today's task.

Key hazards or failure points

Open edges or holes; incomplete guardrails or covers; an unsuitable connection; damaged equipment; insufficient fall clearance; and a rescue plan that cannot be carried out.

Practical controls

- First consider an approved method that removes work at the edge or height. Where exposure remains, use the protection required for the activity and location. There is no single height rule for every fall hazard.
- Have the required competent or qualified person confirm the selected system, installation and limitations. Use the applicable OSHA provision, approved design, site procedure and manufacturer instructions.
- For personal fall arrest, confirm compatible components, approved anchorage, required clearance and rescue arrangements before use. A harness alone provides no protection.

Verify It in the Field

- From a protected position, compare the work area with the plan. Check every affected edge, opening, access point and transition. Verify guardrails or covers against their applicable installation and condition requirements.
- For an arrest system, have the designated person verify anchorage and clearance for the actual equipment and location. Inspect personal equipment before use; remove damaged or impact-loaded equipment under the applicable requirements.
- Confirm the crew can make the planned connections without becoming exposed. Identify the rescue method, available equipment, trained responders and how to call them. Resolve any gap before starting.

Stop and reassess

Stop for missing protection, a moved cover, changed work position, damaged equipment, uncertain clearance or unavailable rescue arrangements. Remain protected; isolate the affected area using the site procedure. Have the responsible person correct and recheck the system, obtain required authorization and rebrief before work resumes.

Ask the crew

- Where could we fall during access, work or the transition between them?
- What proves this protection is suitable and ready at this location?
- If someone falls, how will prompt rescue actually happen?

Verify the complete system before anyone depends on it.

Next step: Record today's changes and checks on the free JSA Planning and Field-Verification Sheet. Supervisor check and attendance are separate.

[Free JSA planning sheet](#)

References: OSHA 1926.501 and 1926.502; task-specific requirements apply. Expanded explanation and references accompany the web version.