

Fall Clearance and Swing: Check the Whole Path

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Why this matters

A connected harness does not prove a fall can stop safely. Moving sideways or changing equipment can invalidate the previous clearance decision.

Objective: Confirm fall-clearance and swing-path decisions for today's position.

Key hazards or failure points

Lower obstructions; sideways swing; low anchor; changed lanyard; edge contact; unverified calculations.

Practical controls

- First consider a method that avoids exposure. Where fall arrest is selected, use the actual system instructions and required technical review.
- Have the responsible person establish clearance and allowable work positions for the installed equipment, anchorage and surrounding obstructions.
- Keep the reviewed configuration and travel limits. Confirm prompt rescue can reach the possible suspended position.

Verify It in the Field

Match equipment identifiers and anchorage location with the reviewed arrangement before entering the exposed area. Resolve substituted components.

From protected access, identify lower levels and sideways obstacles. Have the technical reviewer compare actual geometry with required clearance and swing limits.

Ask the worker to identify the permitted work area and stop boundary. Record the determination and its source; never perform a trial fall.

Stop and reassess

Hold for unknown clearance, an unreviewed anchor or component change, new obstruction or movement beyond the reviewed area. Reassess before exposure.

Ask the crew

1. What could be struck during a fall?
2. Which assumption needs evidence?
3. What change invalidates today's determination?

Use this HOP tool — Validate assumptions: Name one assumption behind today's fall-clearance decision. Identify the document or qualified technical determination that supports it and the actual configuration it covers. If the evidence is missing or conditions differ, hold the exposed step and obtain a revised determination.

Sources: OSHA 1926.502; OSHA OTM V:4; DOE Vol. 2, pp. 22–23. HOP concepts adapted from DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2 (June 2009). No claim to original U.S. Government work; no government endorsement implied.

Free next step: JHA/JSA planning and field-verification worksheet

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/fall-clearance-swing-falls