

Tool Tethers and Falling Object Prevention

Purpose

The purpose of tool tethering is to prevent dropped objects when working at height. Falling tools can cause serious injuries, fatalities, property damage, project delays, and safety violations. Properly securing tools helps protect workers and everyone in the surrounding work area.

Why Tool Tethers Matter

Even small hand tools can become dangerous when dropped from elevated work areas. A falling tool can:

- Cause serious injury or death to workers below
- Damage equipment, vehicles, and property
- Create costly project delays
- Lead to OSHA citations and safety violations

Using a properly rated tool tether keeps tools connected to the worker and significantly reduces the risk of dropped-object incidents.

When Tool Tethers Are Required

Tool tethers should be used whenever employees are:

- Working from ladders
- Working from scaffolds
- Operating aerial lifts (scissor lifts or boom lifts)
- Working on elevated platforms
- Performing overhead work above other personnel
- Working near building edges, shafts, or openings

Any task where a dropped tool could strike a worker or fall to a lower level requires proper tool tethering.

Common Tools That Should Be Secured

Examples of tools that should be tethered include:

- Tape measures
- Utility knives
- Impact drivers
- Hammers
- Speed squares
- C-clamps
- Levels

If a tool can fall, it should be secured whenever work is performed at elevation.

Proper Tool Tether Use

Before Starting Work

- Inspect tethers, lanyards, and attachment points for damage.
- Verify the tether is rated for the weight of the tool.
- Confirm attachment points are secure.
- Ensure tools are compatible with the tethering system.

During Work

- Keep tools attached at all times while working at height.
- Avoid tether lengths that create entanglement hazards.
- Maintain three points of contact while climbing ladders.
- Never throw tools or materials to another worker.
- Store unused tools in closed bags, buckets, or tool pouches.

After Work

- Inspect tethering equipment for wear or damage.
- Remove damaged tethers from service immediately.
- Store equipment properly to prevent deterioration.

Additional Falling Object Controls

Tool tethers are only one part of an effective dropped-object prevention program.

Additional safety measures include:

- Establishing barricaded drop zones below overhead work
- Using debris nets when needed
- Installing toe boards on scaffolds
- Securing materials and equipment
- Keeping workers clear of areas below overhead operations
- Discussing dropped-object hazards during pre-task planning and JHA/THA meetings

These controls help reduce risks and protect employees working at lower levels.

Key Safety Message

If you are working at height, every tool that can fall must be secured. Proper use of tool tethers prevents injuries, protects property, and saves lives.

Safety Reminder

A dropped tool can become a deadly projectile. Inspect your tether, secure your tools, and verify that all equipment is properly attached before beginning elevated work.