

MICHIGAN HAZARD ALERT



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY: Prevention of work-related injuries & illnesses through research & investigation

FALLS FROM SCAFFOLDS CAN BE DEADLY – PREVENTION IS KEY!

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Scaffolds are defined as a temporary elevated platform which can be supported or suspended and its supporting structure (including points of anchorage). Scaffolds are used for supporting employees, materials or both to provide access to a platform for working at heights. A **supported scaffold** consists of one or more platforms supported by rigid, load-bearing members, such as poles, legs, frames, outriggers, etc., and a **suspended scaffold** consists of one or more platforms suspended by ropes or other non-rigid, overhead support.

From 2001–2024, **19 Michigan Construction workers have died from a fall while working on a scaffold. Eighteen workers who died due to a fall from a scaffold were working from a supported scaffold; one individual was working on a suspended scaffold.** The supported scaffold deaths included seven scaffold collapses, three unguarded working surfaces, two falls while climbing, one fall while working from a ladder positioned on the scaffold platform, and one death was caused by a worker falling from a roof, striking the individual on the scaffold and causing him to fall from the work platform. The cause of three deaths is unknown. An anchor point failed in the death of the worker utilizing a suspended scaffold.

EXAMPLES OF FATAL CONSTRUCTION FALLS FROM A SCAFFOLD IN MICHIGAN

- A laborer was killed when the scaffold platform he was working from collapsed, and the 183-pound hoist motor, which he had been using to raise and lower a corner of the platform, fell on him.
- A journeyman mason/foreman died as a result of falling 35 feet from an unguarded working surface of a Hydro Mobile 2 scaffold. The scaffold had been repositioned without reinstalling the guardrails at the ends of the working platform and without proper planking. He was working in a backward direction and fell from the unguarded edge to the concrete surface below. (See Photo 1).
- A scrap metal hauler fell 15-18 feet from a scaffold while performing building demolition to procure HVAC ductwork. When using a sledgehammer to break the straps holding the duct work, a 20-foot-long piece of duct work struck him, causing him to fall from the scaffold.
- A painter fell 120 to 130 feet from a water tower that he had been painting. He had moved the cable supporting the single-point adjustable scaffold “spider” he was working from to the other side of a post on the top of the tower. When he reassembled his equipment, he placed only one eye of the two-eyed chocker into the shackle on the cable that secured the spider to the supporting equipment on the tower. He was not using a lifeline with a harness and rope grab.
- A male electrician installing an exterior light fixture on a pole barn died due to a 24-foot fall to a concrete pad when the 2-jack, 10-foot-high tubular welded mobile scaffold he was working from tipped over. The scaffold base was positioned partially on a concrete pad and braced by a ladder which was positioned and secured by a crowbar in sand.
- A male carpenter died due to a 20-foot fall when the home-made window jack scaffold he was working from collapsed. Two 16d nails secured the 2x6 boards on the south side of the scaffold directly to the house frame. The decedent and his coworker traveled to the far south end of the scaffold to receive material being handed to them through the window opening. The 2x6s broke away from the home and the 18-foot section of scaffold they were standing on collapsed. (See Photo 2).



Photo 1. MIFACE Investigation #08MI009: Journeyman Mason Died After Stepping Backward Off a Raised Mobile Scaffold



Photo 2. Carpenter died due to a 20-foot fall when the home-made window jack scaffold he was working from collapsed.

PREVENTING WORK-RELATED FATALITIES FROM SCAFFOLD

Scaffolds allow workers to work safely at heights by providing a stable surface and room to work and store materials, **but only** if the scaffold is constructed properly, the workers perform the work safely, and the workers are protected from a fall with the appropriate fall protection.



Plan ahead to get the job done safely.

- Perform a [Job Safety Analysis](#) (JSA) or a [Job Hazard Analysis](#) (JHA) to define the job scope, assess ground stability, slope, and uneven terrain, break down the tasks, and identify potential hazards, such as load and duty rating, hazards encountered during transport, assembly/erection, use, and dismantling, electrocution, high traffic areas, etc.
 - **Performing a site assessment** to determine ground conditions will inform what items (e.g. mud sills, base plates, leg extensions) are required to ensure a level, firm foundation for the scaffold.
- Use JSA/JHA process to apply the [Hierarchy of Controls](#) to minimize or eliminate the identified hazards.

Provide the right personnel and equipment based on the hazard assessment.

- **Ensure a qualified person** designs the scaffold and that it is constructed and loaded in accordance with that design.
- **Ensure a competent person** qualified in scaffold erection, moving, dismantling or alteration of the scaffold:
 - Selects, uses and supervises/directs experienced and trained employees to erect, move, dismantle or alter the scaffold.
 - Inspects the scaffold for visible defects before each work shift as well as after any occurrence that could affect its structural integrity, such as any alteration or after adverse weather.
- **Ensure proper scaffold selection based upon scope of work and hazard assessment. At a minimum, consider the following:**
 - Structure height, size, and configuration needing work, platform access, static or mobile setup, load-bearing capacity, guardrails and toe boards, plank strength, length, and spacing and securement.
 - **If working platform is 10 feet or more above ground level, a personal fall arrest system.**

Train everyone to use equipment safely, *every time* they are working at a height requiring fall protection. Training programs must enable each employee to recognize the hazards associated with the work, the fall hazards at the site, and the required procedures to minimize the hazards.

- **Verify** trainers meet competent and qualified person Scaffold Safety Standard requirements.
- **Ensure** workers who erect, disassemble, move, operate, repair, maintain or inspect the scaffold are trained by a *competent* person and meet the training requirements of the Scaffold Safety Standard.
- **Ensure** workers who perform work while on a scaffold platform are trained by a *qualified* person to recognize the hazards associated with the type of scaffold being used and understand the procedures to control or minimize those hazards, including fall protection if applicable.

RESOURCES

- Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA)
 - Construction Safety Standard [Part 12](#): Scaffolds and Scaffold Platforms.
 - [Scaffold Erecting and Dismantling Fact Sheet](#)
 - [Scaffold Wind and Weather Protection Fact Sheet](#)
 - [Suspended Scaffold Safety Fact Sheet](#)
 - [Fall Prevention – Stop Falls. Save Lives](#) webpage.
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
 - [Scaffolding](#) webpage offers [Construction-related information, Hazards and Solutions](#), and [Additional Resources](#).
 - [Scaffold e-tool](#) includes illustrated safety checklists for specific types of scaffolds and identifies hazards and hazard controls.
 - [A Guide to Scaffold Use in the Construction Industry](#)
 - OSHA Publications: [Fall Prevention/Protection](#) topic webpage
- Center for Construction Research and Training (CPWR) [Stop Construction Falls](#) webpage contains links to fall prevention resources in both English and Spanish.
- An example of JHA for scaffold erection, use, and disassembly developed by the US Army can be found [here](#).
- [Supported Scaffold User Awareness Training](#) presented by Griffin Safety Solutions at the Michigan Safety Conference, 4/19/2023.

DID YOU KNOW?

Competent person: capable of identifying existing and predictable hazards in the surroundings or working conditions which are unsanitary, hazardous, or dangerous to employees, and who has authorization to take prompt corrective measures to eliminate them.

Qualified: a person who, by possession of a recognized degree, certificate, or professional standing, or who by extensive knowledge, training, and experience, has successfully demonstrated his/her ability to solve or resolve problems related to the subject matter, the work, or the project.