

## **Nonfatal Construction Falls Program**

Completed Occupational Health Branch Activity, 2001-2005

### **Background and Purpose**

Each year, one-third of U.S. construction worker fatalities are the result of a fall. In California, more than 1800 construction workers are injured from falls each year. The **Occupational Health Surveillance and Evaluation Program (OHSEP)** tracked nonfatal construction-related falls using Doctor's First Reports of Occupational Illness or Injury (DFRs) from 2001-2003. All doctors in CA are required to fill out a DFR if the patient was treated for a work-related illness or injury.

OHSEP tracked falls to identify construction trades and tasks that have a high risk of a ladder-fall incident, analyze workplace practices related to ladder-fall incidents, and develop strategies to prevent falls.

### **Activities**

To accomplish this, we:

- Collected construction-related cases for falls from heights for 2001-2003;
- Interviewed workers with ladder fall cases to learn about work task, equipment, use of fall protection systems and opportunities for fall prevention; and
- Will conduct construction worksite visits to refine prevention strategies.

### **Partners**

- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)
- Public Health Institute

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

1. Which construction trades have the highest number of ladder falls?
2. What is the most common piece of equipment workers fall from in California?
3. What are common risks for falls from ladders?
4. What are ways to reduce falls from extension ladders?

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#### **1. Which construction trades have the highest number of ladder falls?**

The largest number of ladder falls occurred among carpenters (23%), construction laborers (13%), painters (12%), electricians (10%), and plumbers (9%).

#### **2. What is the most common piece of equipment workers fall from in California?**

The stepladder.

### 3. What are common risks for falls from ladders?

- Failure to set-up the ladder properly: using an unopened stepladder, or placing ladders on uneven ground;
- Working from ladders instead of using them just for access: if a person does not maintain three points of contact with the ladder, it is easy for him or her to lose his/her balance and fall.

### 4. What are ways to reduce falls from extension ladders?

- Tie off the top of the ladder.
- Secure the bottom of the ladder to prevent the bottom from sliding out.
- Set-up ladders at a safe angle (75°).
- The top of the ladder must extend 3' beyond the top edge or resting point.

#### **Related Resources** (current at the time project was completed)

- Cal/OSHA Fall Protection Standard [[www.dir.ca.gov/title8/sb4a24.html](http://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/sb4a24.html)]
- Falls from Elevation - NIOSH safety and health topic [[www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/falls/](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/falls/) ]
- Fall Protection – Federal OSHA web resource [[www.osha.gov/SLTC/fallprotection/](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/fallprotection/) ]

#### **Related OHB Publications**

- Fall Prevention Guidelines – available in English and Spanish

These publications and more information about the work of Occupational Health Branch (OHB) are available on our website: [www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/ohb](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/ohb) .