

Myths and Facts about Falls in Residential Construction

Myth 1: Residential contractors don't get injured as badly as commercial construction workers.

FACT: Half of all construction workers who have fallen to their death in Massachusetts worked in residential construction.



John Rekus/NIOSH

A 30-year-old roofer was rolling tar paper on a new pitch roof of a 2-story Cape when he backed off the edge. He fell 24 feet to his death, and left behind a wife and children.

Myth 2: You have to fall a long distance to kill yourself.

FACT: If you hit your head hard enough, you can die from any height. Half the construction workers who died in a fall fell from a height of 25 feet or less. Even if you survive a fall, you may be laid up for some time with a disability.

A 68-year-old painter died after falling 10 feet from a small front porch of a 2 story home. The painter fell when he climbed down a step ladder and leaned into a rotted porch railing. He had painted homes for over 40 years.

Myth 3: Experienced workers don't fall.

FACT: The average age of construction workers who have fallen to their death was 43. These men had many years of experience.

"It just happens so fast. It's when you think you're safe that you need to be more careful."

—Gene, Homebuilder

Myth 4: Fall Protection Equipment is more of a hindrance than a help.

FACT: Nothing is more of a hindrance than a lifetime disability. Fall protection equipment is continually improving. Retractable lifelines allow for maximum flexibility. Roof anchors can be nailed into the structural members of wooden roofs.

Myth 5: Working safely is costly.

FACT: Some equipment isn't costly, such as ladder stabilizers, guardrail holders, and fall protection kits. Other items such as scaffolds are more expensive. Invest in this equipment, just as you would a quality tool.



"I fell 3 stories and was out of work for 8 weeks. I was subcontracting and didn't have comp. This was a long time ago, but I probably lost around \$5,000. A harness would have cost me \$50 back then."

—Dan, General Contractor

Today, a full personal fall arrest system costs around \$150.

FACT: Falls Can Be Prevented

Plan Ahead

Bring the right equipment to the job, and use it correctly.



Stay Alert

Always think first and don't take risks.
Watch out for others on the job.

Train Your Workers

Make sure that your employees know how to work safely at heights.

Additional Information

On-site Consultation Program

Massachusetts Department of Labor Standards
(508) 616-0461
www.mass.gov/dols

OSHA Regional Office

JFK Federal Building- Room E340
Boston, MA 02203
(617) 565-9860
www.osha.gov

The Center for Construction Research and Training

Ladder safety materials and resources.
www.cpwr.com

MA FACE Project

Occupational Health Surveillance Program
Massachusetts Department of Public Health
250 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02108
(617) 624-5627
www.mass.gov/dph/FACE

FACE is an occupational injury prevention project conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. FACE is not responsible for the enforcement of safety standards. FACE investigates workplace fatalities to learn about risk factors that lead to fatal injury in order to prevent future deaths.

The FACE Project is funded by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

Many thanks to the contractors and others who helped develop this brochure.

FALLS

The Leading Killer on
Construction Sites



Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation
(FACE) Project

