

Scaffolding Safety

Scaffolding, when properly designed and erected can still pose hazards for workers just because the nature of their use. Safety precautions must always be observed regardless of the height of the scaffolding. When scaffold accidents occur, they are generally caused by faulty design or inadequate construction, however in many cases accidents are caused by improper use or poor maintenance practices.

By law, all scaffolds must be constructed under supervision of a “competent person”. A “competent person” as defined by Cal/OSHA *is a person who is capable of identifying existing and predictable hazards in the surroundings or working conditions that are unsanitary, hazardous, or dangerous to employees.* The competent person has the *authority* to impose prompt corrective measures to eliminate these hazards. Scaffold workers should be well aware of company safety procedures and any applicable legal codes, standards or regulations.

The following safety suggestions should also be kept in mind whenever work will be done on or around scaffolds.

- Scaffolds must be constructed on solid ground. Check to see that there is no evidence of wet soil or erosion around the scaffold base.
- Clear the area around the scaffold of debris, unneeded equipment, material, and other hazards that could jeopardize the safety of the scaffold or cause workers to trip or fall.
- Make sure all scaffold components are in good condition. Solid planking using approved materials should be properly spaced with toe boards and guardrails on all required working levels.
- Any scaffold equipment which appears to be damaged or which becomes damaged while in use should be removed.
- Before use, a qualified person should inspect the scaffold, checking the guardrails, connectors, fastenings, footings, tie-ins, and bracing. Guardrail systems should be installed on all open platforms.
- Ensure that scaffold workers are properly protected from falls or, where applicable, using proper fall arrest equipment.
- Material hoisted from the ground should be safely and adequately controlled. Scaffolds should be protected against bumps or strikes from workers, machinery or equipment.
- Make sure materials loaded onto the scaffold are safely supported and pose no risk of overload. Equipment should not be stockpiled on a scaffold. At the end of the day, materials and tools should be removed from platforms and safely stored.

Employers have a responsibility to educate workers in the safe use of scaffolds. Workers should be instructed to clear platforms of all ice, snow or other slippery material before using to prevent slipping hazards. Scaffold work should always be postponed during a storm or high winds. Even the strongest and safest scaffold can be involved in an accident if installed improperly or carelessly.