

HEALTH AND SAFETY ADVISORY

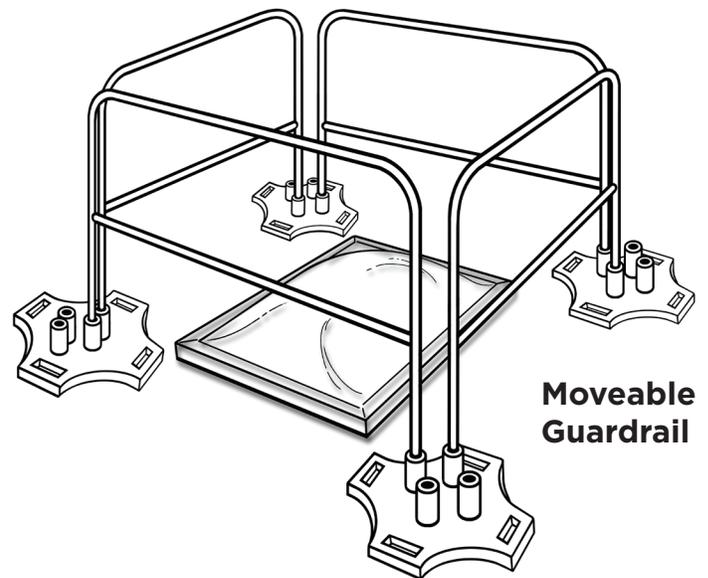
WORKING AROUND ROOF OPENINGS AND SKYLIGHTS

In recent years, there have been a number of incidents of workers falling through roof openings and skylights. These incidents have resulted in critical injuries and fatalities. With this in mind, it is important to understand our responsibilities under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and be aware of some straightforward ways to prevent these types of incidents from occurring in the future.

Section 26.3(2) of the Regulations for Construction Projects 213/91 under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* requires that employers protect workers from falling through an opening with either a guardrail system or a protective covering. Workers can use a travel restraint or fall-arrest system **only** if it is not possible to use a guardrail or protective cover to protect against falling through an opening.

Guardrails

Guardrails must be provided around all roof openings that are not fitted with permanent or temporary coverings. If the guardrail is made of wood, it must be constructed and installed so that it is capable of resisting all loads that it may be subjected to by a worker. If the guardrail is not made of wood, it must meet the criteria laid out in section 26.3(4) of the Construction Regulations. Remember that while workers are installing temporary guardrails, they must use a fall protection system to protect against a fall.



Covers

Guardrails are the preferred method for protecting workers around roof openings, but they may not always be practical. Opening covers are the next best option. If covers are used, they must

- completely cover the opening
- be securely fastened
- be adequately identified as a covering for an opening
- be made from material that is adequate to support all loads to which the covering may be subjected
- be capable of supporting a live load of at least 2.4 kilonewtons per square metre without exceeding the allowable unit stresses for the material used.

Make opening covers stand out with bright paint. Include a warning sign—**DANGER! OPENING—DO NOT REMOVE! DO NOT LOAD!** Always **fasten the cover securely** to the roof to prevent workers from removing it and falling through the opening.

Note: Where permanent covers or hatches are installed, they should be kept close at all times, except when they are being used for access.

Skylights

Prior to the installation of a skylight, each skylight opening must be treated the same as all other roof openings. Once the skylight is installed, there may be a perception that the area is safe; however, the skylight itself has very little strength. If a worker steps on or falls into a skylight, it could break and cause the worker to fall to the area below. To protect against this falling hazard, install temporary guarding around each skylight in the vicinity of the work area.

General Contractors, Constructors, or Owners

If you—as a general contractor, constructor, or owner—have installed temporary guardrails or protective covers around roof openings so that multiple trades or sub-contractors can access the roof safely, it is your responsibility to ensure they are in place and maintained. On an ongoing basis, verify that all the covers are in place. If they are not in place, stop work in the area until they are in place. Instruct all sub-contractors that if a guardrail or cover has to be removed to perform work, they must

- Keep all other workers out of the area.
- Use another means of fall protection while performing the work.
- Replace the guardrail or covers when they leave the area.

Many workers have fallen through roof openings when the area was left unattended or when inadequate protection was used.

Workers

If you must remove a cover or guardrail to perform your work, it is your responsibility under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to replace it when your task is complete. It is also your responsibility under the Act to notify to your supervisor if you notice an unprotected opening. Remember to always use another means of fall protection when working near an unprotected opening.

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