



SafetyAlert

We're Serious About Safety

Scaffolding Safety: The Competent Person Holds the Key

The Bureau of Labor Statistics' Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI) reported 52 fatal falls to lower levels from scaffolding in 2020.¹ All of these can be controlled by compliance with OSHA standards. Source: <https://www.osha.gov/scaffolding>

Many different types of companies, from general industry, construction, and maritime, employ various types of scaffolding for work or access to elevated areas.

There are too many different kinds of scaffolds to list in this publication, but they all start with one important ingredient: the competent person. OSHA defines the competent person as someone designated by the employer with the knowledge or experience to recognize an unsafe condition and has the authority to correct that condition prior to the beginning of work.

Any scaffold erected or dismantled, up to a height of 125 feet, must be done under the supervision of a competent person (scaffolds over 125 feet must be designed and approved by a qualified person-such as a structural engineer). Any scaffold erected or dismantled, up to a height of 125 feet, must be done under the supervision of a competent person (scaffolds over 125 feet must be designed and approved by a qualified person-such as a structural engineer).

The competent person must inspect all scaffolding prior to use on a daily basis, or whenever adverse weather conditions dictate, prior to work. He or she must know the correct application and components to the scaffold, as well as its structural limitations. The competent person must also take into consideration other safety related issues, such as: electrical hazards, access, planking, fall protection, protection from falling objects from the scaffold deck, load capacity, hoisting areas, weather conditions, and exposure to overhead work.

The Tagging System

One useful tool gaining popularity is a scaffold tagging system. This system allows the competent person to identify the scaffold to potential users by color-coded tags, normally placed near the point of access, such as a ladder or stair tower. Red tags indicate a scaffold that is unsafe to access or work from. Yellow tags mean that no access is granted to users, only those designated to make changes, such as dismantling or adding components. Green tags mean that the competent person has inspected the scaffold and employees may use it.



Scaffolding Checklist

- Has the competent person supervised the erection of the scaffolding?
- Has the competent person inspected the scaffolding prior to use?
- Is the scaffold plumb & level?
- Does the planking extend a minimum 6" over the bearers?
- Is it situated on leveling jacks, casters or mudsills?
- Are there guard rails and toe boards over 10 feet in height?
- Have you maintained the proper distance from energized electrical lines?
- If not, has the local utility been contacted to shield the lines?
- Have you maintained the area below, free of impalement hazards?
- Is the access adequate, or do employees have to climb around projecting scaffold planking?
- Are the weather conditions satisfactory for scaffold work?
- Are employees wearing personal fall arrest systems for work on suspended scaffolds?
- Is that fall arrest lifeline attached to an anchorage point independent of the tieback lines for the suspended scaffold?

Electrical Hazards

Electricity is one of the most prevalent hazards to scaffold users, especially residential contractors using ladders, pump jacks and welded pipe frames. Remember OSHA's distance formula when exposed:

Voltage	Minimum Distance	Alternatives
Less Than 300 Volts	3 Feet (0.9m) N/A	N/A
300 Volts to 50kv	10 feet (3.1m) N/A	N/A
More than 50kv	10 feet (3.1m) plus 0.4 inches for each 1kv over 50kv	2 times the length of the line, but never less than 10 feet (3.1m)



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