

What is a Dropped Object?

A dropped object is any item that falls from height or becomes dislodged and falls from its original position. On construction sites, this can include tools, materials, scaffold components, fixings or equipment parts.

Dropped objects can occur when items are not properly secured or when they are knocked from height. Construction environments are particularly high risk because multiple trades often work at different levels at the same time.

Even a small object dropped from height can cause serious injury or a fatality. The most common areas where dropped objects occur are scaffolds, steel structures, roofing areas, stairwells and lifting operations.

- A tool left near a scaffold edge can be knocked off and fall
- Materials stacked too close to unprotected edges can slip
- Loose bolts, fittings or connections can fail and fall
- Unsecured loads during crane lifts can shift or drop

When working at height, gravity increases the force of impact. The higher the object falls from, the greater the risk of serious injury.

Hard hats provide protection, but they are the last line of defence. Preventing objects from falling in the first place is critical.

On busy construction sites, dropped objects are especially dangerous because workers are frequently moving below active work areas. Without proper controls such as toe boards, debris netting, exclusion zones and tool lanyards, the risk significantly increases.

Common high-risk construction activities include steel erection, roofing and cladding installation, scaffold erection and dismantling, crane lifting operations, Mobile Elevated Work Platform (MEWP) work and any task where trades are working above others.

If you are working at height, you are responsible for the safety of those below you.

How to Prevent Dropped Objects

When working at height or below overhead work, here's what to do:

- Carry out a task-specific risk assessment before starting work
- Ensure scaffolds are fully boarded with toe boards installed
- Use tool lanyards and secure tool bags where appropriate
- Never leave loose materials near edges
- Do not throw tools or materials down from height
- Set up and respect exclusion zones beneath overhead work
- Inspect scaffolds, tools and fittings regularly
- Maintain good housekeeping and promptly remove any debris

If you notice loose fittings, missing edge protection, unsafe stacking or someone working unsafely at height, stop the job and report it immediately.

Small objects can have serious consequences; prevention of dropped objects is everyone's responsibility.

Legislation

Under the *Saskatchewan Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, 2020*, employers, contractors or owners must protect workers from falling objects by providing overhead barriers where a worker could be struck. Areas where falling objects are a hazard must be clearly marked with barriers or warning devices. Protection, such as wire mesh on suspended scaffolds to prevent objects from falling, is required.

Employers must also implement fall protection systems when workers may fall 3 m or more and ensure that training and planning for work at height is carried out safely.

These duties form part of legal obligations to plan and supervise work to prevent injuries from dropped objects and falls.