

HIDDEN OPENINGS

Safety Topic V6-0966

Fall Protection, Walking-Working

Falls through floor and roof openings are some of the most dangerous incidents on construction and industrial sites.

- One wrong step can send a worker through a skylight, shaft, catwalk gap, or temporary hole covering, leading to severe injury or death.

Any surface opening must be properly guarded or covered.
Even temporary hazards require full protection.

- A piece of plywood tossed over a hole isn't enough unless it's secure, labeled, and able to support the load placed on it.
- Thin coverings, loose boards, or materials that aren't designed to support weight can fail when stepped on.
- Don't rely on visual memory alone – conditions on job sites can change quickly.



Openings aren't always in the floor.

- Roofs may have skylights that look solid but can't hold the weight of a person.
- Tanks, pits, and unguarded ladderways also present serious fall risks.
- Even catwalks and platforms with missing railings or guardrails can quickly become the site of a tragic fall.

If you're working near an opening:

- Make sure all floor or roof openings are either completely covered or protected by guardrails and toe boards.
- Do not step on any covering unless you know it is properly secured and rated to support your weight.
- Always treat skylights as fall hazards, even if they appear to be solid.
- Never remove or alter guards or covers unless authorized and it's safe to do so.
- If you see an unprotected or poorly marked opening, report it immediately.
- Use fall protection if working near any unguarded edge or opening.

Discussion

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What types of openings have you seen on jobs that could pose a fall hazard?

How do you ensure new workers or visitors are aware of hidden openings on site?