

Using warning lines: Construction industry best practices

Subdivision 3/M



These are best practices specific to construction for using a warning line to alert workers they are approaching an unprotected edge of a roof, floor, or other work surface.

This information applies to all trades except those that do roofing work, which we define as “hoisting, storing, applying, and removing roofing materials and equipment.” For roofing work, use a warning line for fall protection only if you follow the requirements in 1926.502(f), *Warning line systems* and 437-003-1502, *Warning line systems for roofing work*.

What is a warning line?

A warning line is a barrier such as rope, wire, or chain that warns workers they are approaching an unprotected edge of a roof, floor, or other work surface.

Never use a warning line as a substitute for a guardrail.

Use a guardrail or another fall protection system described in 1926.502, *Fall protection systems, criteria, and practices*.

How do you set up a warning line?

Set up the warning line so it keeps workers at least 10 feet back from the unprotected edge. This “setback” distance must eliminate the exposure and the risk that a worker could fall over the edge. In some situations, you may need to increase the distance to eliminate the risk. Factors such as weather, visibility, slope, condition of the work surface, the work performed, materials handled, and the experience and supervision of the workers can increase the risk of a fall — even at a 10-foot setback. The correct setback distance eliminates the exposure and the risk of a fall.



A warning line must be set up so it eliminates the risk of a worker falling over the edge. Use signs and flagging to emphasize the hazard.

Industry best practices include the following:

- The warning line should be 34-39 inches above the work surface.
- The warning line should be rope, wire, or a chain. Avoid using plastic tape for a warning line; workers should be able to feel the line if they back up against it, even if they're wearing heavy clothing.
- The warning line should be flagged at least every 6 feet with high-visibility material and have warning signs that are visible to workers.
- Stanchions that support the warning line should be able to withstand a force of at least 16 pounds, applied horizontally in the direction of the unprotected edge, without tipping over.
- No workers can enter the area between the warning line and the unprotected edge unless they are protected by a fall protection system described in 1926.502, *Fall protection systems, criteria, and practices*.

More information

Oregon OSHA rules

- ☞ [1926.502, Fall protection systems, criteria, and practices](#)
- ☞ [437-003-1502, Warning line systems for roofing work](#)

Oregon OSHA letter of interpretation

- ☞ [Warning lines](#)



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Workers

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Industry best practice: A warning line should have signs such as this one that alert workers they are approaching an unprotected edge. This sign is available for download at osha.oregon.gov.

The Technical Section of Oregon OSHA produced this fact sheet to highlight health and safety programs and rules. The information is intended to explain the rules and provide best practices to employers.