

Using warning lines: Construction industry best practices

Subdivision
3/M

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Construction industry
best practices**

This fact sheet explains construction-industry best practices 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 – roofing work means, “hoisting, storing, applying, and removing roofing materials and equipment.” When doing roofing work, you can 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.



You can use a warning line to alert workers they are approaching an unprotected edge of a roof, floor, or other work surface. The warning line must be set up so that it eliminates the risk that a worker could fall over the edge. Signs and flagging emphasize the hazard.

How do you set up a warning line?

Set up the warning line so that 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. You may need to increase the distance to eliminate the risk in some situations. Factors such as weather, visibility, the slope and 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 set back. The correct setback distance eliminates the exposure and the risk of a fall.

! 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.

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Industry best practices include the following:

- The work surface should be relatively flat with a slope of 2 in 12 or less.
- 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*.

Where can you learn more about warning lines?

Oregon OSHA rules

- 1926.502, *Fall protection systems, criteria, and practices*
- 1926.502(f), *Warning line systems*
- 437-003-1502, *Warning line systems for roofing work*

Oregon OSHA letter of interpretation

- *Warning lines*

INDUSTRY BEST PRACTICE: a warning line should have signs such as this one that alert workers they are approaching an unprotected edge.



This sign may be printed from our website at full size (8.5 x 11 inches) at osha.oregon.gov.