



Construction Safety: Building Stairways

Interior building stairways during the construction process can be very hazardous. Lack of elevator availability or limited access to the elevator may lead to heavy foot traffic on these stairways. If special attention is not given to safety considerations on stairways, accidents during usage are likely to occur. Here are a few general safety suggestions relevant to stairways during the building construction process:

- All railings should be in place before the stairway is opened for use. Landings with open sides need standard guardrails for proper fall protection. The stairs need handrails for workers to hold when ascending or descending. Guardrails and handrails need to be smooth surfaced to prevent punctures or lacerations and to prevent clothes from snagging.
- There should be adequate lighting in the stairway. Adequate lighting can be a problem since permanent lighting is usually installed after the stairway construction is completed. OSHA construction standards require 5 foot-candles of light in stairways. The amount of light can be measured with a standard light meter. If the lighting is inadequate, a temporary light bulb string should be installed in the stairway. Each bulb should be equipped with a protective cover and the string should be inspected daily for burned out or broken bulbs.
- Keep the stairway clean to reduce the likelihood of slips, trips or falls. Do not store any tools or construction materials on the stairway. Do not throw trash down on the stairway. Clean up any liquid spills or rain water immediately. Any slippery conditions must be corrected.
- As much as possible, avoid using the stairway as a means of access for transporting materials between floors. Carrying small materials and tools is fine as long as the materials do not block your vision. Trying to go up or down a stairway while carrying large items is physically demanding and increases your potential for a strain or sprain injury as well as a slip, trip or fall. Asking a co-worker to help you carry the load may reduce your exposure to a strain, but it may increase the exposure for both of you to be involved in a slip or fall accident. The best alternative is to use the building elevator or crane service.

Do not overlook the potential hazards associated with stairway usage. Stairway safety should be part of your safety program on building construction sites.

