

Building Shaft and Open Holes toolbox talk

A simple, 5 minute outline of what to cover in a toolbox talk on Building Shaft and Open Holes.



[Download a Building Shaft and Open Holes toolbox talk pdf](#)

Falls through unprotected opening and building shafts are a serious hazard to workers that can result in serious injuries and death. Open holes and building shafts are common in roadworks, construction, demolition, and renovation works. Falls through open holes still remain one of the most prevalent risks on a construction site.

Why run a Building Shaft and Open Holes Toolbox Talk?

- Make workers aware of the risk
- What to do to help prevent workers from falling
- Cover legal duties

Definition of Building Shaft and Open Hole

Definitions of building shafts and an open hole may differ from country to country; but this is a definition taken from the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety.

Building Shafts A continuous vertical space that is substantially enclosed on all sides for two or more floors and includes elevator shafts, ventilation shafts, stairwells, and service shafts	Open Hole/Floor Opening An opening in a floor, platform, pavement, or yard that measures 300 mm (12 inches) or more in its smallest dimension.
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Examples of floor holes are – manholes, skylights, missing floorboards, precast concrete openings, and roof and floor drains.

Legal Duties

Legal responsibility for who is responsible for ensuring that building shafts and open holes are covered, may vary from country to country. Generally it will be the responsibility of an employer, main contractor, or owner to ensure that building shafts and open holes are covered securely and may require the following:

- Must be capable of supporting any load placed on it or workers standing on it
- Secured, so it cannot be easily removed
- The cover should cover the entire opening
- The area should be provided with toe boards and guardrails

Risk Assessment/Hazards That May Result in Falls

- Unguarded openings
- Improperly secured openings
- Covers that cannot support weight
- Material falling through the openings
- Poor lighting making an opening difficult to see
- Improperly labelled openings
- Poor housekeeping – debris and equipment covering openings

Control Measures and Safeguards

Implement the following safe work practices to reduce injuries:

- Assess work site for opening and holes (secured or unsecured), prior to work starting
- If the hole must be open, install permanent barriers around the perimeter
- Communicate any hazards with other workers in the area
- Notify your supervisor of any new openings and maintain a register/ permit system
- Develop a fall protection plan
- Develop safe practice procedures

Ensure covers do the following:

- Completely cover the opening
- Are securely fastened
- Are labelled correctly
- Can support any load that may be encountered on the work site
- Protected with a standard toe board or solid enclosing screen to prevent materials falling through
- Guard rails installed entirely around the opening

Key takeaways:

- Falls can cause injuries and even death
- Ensure openings are covered properly
- Implement Safe work practices
- Everyone is responsible to ensure that openings are covered properly

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