

UFOs: unsafe falling/flying objects

Contact with objects

Contact with objects and equipment land within the top three leading causes of work-related injuries, according to the National Safety Council's "Injury Facts®."

These types of injuries include:

- A moving object striking a worker
- A worker striking against an object or equipment, including bumping into, stepping on, kicking, or being pushed or thrown onto an object
- A part of a worker's body being squeezed, pinched, compressed, or crushed in equipment, between shifting objects, between stationary objects, or by a wire or rope
- A worker being struck, caught, or crushed in collapsing structure, equipment, or material
- A worker being injured as a result of friction or pressure between the person and the source of injury
- A worker being injured from vibration

Bet you didn't know that UFOs can be workplace hazards. They can when they're "unsafe falling/flying objects"—and they cause injuries at a surprising number of worksites across pretty much all industries, from factories to offices.

In construction, for example, you're at risk from falling objects when you're beneath equipment, scaffolds, structures, etc., or where overhead work is being performed.

And in auto repair shops, using power tools or doing things like pushing, pulling, or prying may cause objects to become airborne. Injuries can range from minor abrasions to concussions, blindness, or death.

Preventing "UFO" encounters

Preventing injuries from unsafe falling or flying objects isn't rocket science. Try these tips:

Tools

- Secure tools when working under equipment or over people.
- Use toeboards and screens when working over people.
- Inspect tools. Don't use tools with loose, cracked, or splintered handles.
- Inspect guards on grinder and make sure to wear eye and face protection: a face shield, plus safety glasses under the shield.

Equipment

- Wear hard hats when working under equipment.
- Use safety glasses, goggles, or shields where tools or machines may cause flying particles or debris.

- Machines should be set up so the object being machined is properly secured and will not fly out when the machine is turning. Check all guards to see if they are in place and working properly.
- With older equipment, some guards may be missing or lost. Check to ensure all rotating and moving parts are protected and contact cannot be made. This may require working with leadership to install or retrofit new devices on older machines.
- Cleaning with compressed air can be dangerous. If used for cleaning, it should be reduced to less than 30 psi, and should only be used when effective chip guarding is in place and PPE is worn. Never clean clothing with compressed air.

Storage

Objects should be stored safely to prevent them from falling. If shelves or storage racks are used, check them for defects so they will not collapse and cause their contents to fall. Store heavy and bulky objects close to the floor.

Lighter and smaller objects should be stored higher. Position objects securely on shelves or racks. Watch for vibrating equipment in the area that may cause objects to fall from storage containers. Securing racks and shelves to the floor, ceiling, or wall is a best practice to prevent tip overs.

(Continued)

Employees

Prevent injuries from falling or flying objects by looking out for:

- New employees not familiar with tools, equipment, or processes
 - Employees new to the workforce with little experience and knowledge of work practices
 - Employees unfamiliar with equipment requirements, use, limitations, and protections
- Employees who work with special behavior plans requiring limited access to portable objects
 - Stressors, such as:
 - Untidiness
 - Noise
 - Fatigue, shiftwork, etc.

Industries with the most common hazards from falling or flying objects:

Automotive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cleaning equipment with pressurized air• Grinding and machining parts• Using air tools• Working under equipment – dropping tools• Working under equipment – dust
Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dropping tools and materials from height• Flying saw debris• Unstable stacking of supplies
Fabrication shops	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dropping items from overhead cranes• Dropping tools• Grinding sparks (in eyes and ears)
General/All industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cutting boxes (holding and “dropping-to-catch”)• Holding and dropping hot liquids• Holding and dropping knives• Material handling – dropping items on toes (palleted materials/from hands/other)• Tools falling off ladders, roofs, gutters
Grocery store/Retail	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grabbing items from high on shelf• Storage of material on mezzanines
Landscaping	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Debris flying from blowing materials• Debris flying from weed whacking• Stung by wasps/bees
Long-term care/Hospital/Health care	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Combative or aggressive residents, patients, visitors• Kitchen storage (food and pots and pans)• Storage retrieval
Reforestation/Firefighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Struck by branches• Stung by wasps/bees
Schools/Group homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kitchen storage/retrieval• Lawn maintenance - mowing and edging• Struck by objects thrown by students
Warehouse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Storage retrieval