

Common Causes of Scaffolding Accidents on Construction Sites

The dangers many workers face in New York City

Millions of New York construction workers rely on scaffolds every day to perform their jobs, but working at heights is one of the most dangerous activities on a construction site. Falls from heights are the leading cause of death in construction, with scaffolding involved in about [one in four](#) fatal falls. Despite safety regulations, these accidents still occur, often resulting in severe injuries like traumatic brain injuries (TBI), broken bones, and spinal cord injuries (SCIs), or injuries that are fatal.

For workers injured in scaffolding accidents, workers' compensation benefits are available to cover medical bills, lost wages, and rehabilitation. However, understanding the common causes of these accidents – such as system failures, environmental hazards, and human error – can be crucial in filing a successful workers' compensation claim. An experienced [New York City workers' compensation attorney](#) can help workers navigate these complexities, ensuring they receive the compensation they deserve while holding responsible parties accountable.

Heightened risk of scaffolding accidents

While anyone working on or near scaffolding is vulnerable to an accident, certain types of workers are more likely to be injured in scaffold-related incidents. Craftsmen and laborers, including carpenters, masons, stonemasons, painters, drywall installers, lathers, and maintenance workers, file the most workers' compensation claims related to scaffolding accidents. These workers spend significant time on scaffolds, making them more exposed to the dangers that arise from scaffolding system failures, environmental conditions, and human error.

Common types of scaffolding involved in these accidents are self-supporting scaffolds and improvised structures. Many of these accidents involve welded tubular or ladder scaffolds, which are widely used but can pose serious risks when not properly maintained or installed.

The 3 main causes of scaffolding accidents

Scaffolding accidents on construction sites generally fall into three categories: system failures, environmental factors, and human factors.

1. System failures

System failures occur when a part or parts falter, leading to instability or scaffolding collapse. This can include issues with the foundation, support elements, connections, or safety devices. Problems with scaffolding foundations can lead to buckling, tilting, or rolling, while inadequate

connections or anchorage may cause scaffolds to shift or fall apart under pressure. Examples of system failures include:

- Platform or planking breaking or slipping.
- Support poles tilting or tipping over.
- Wheels on mobile scaffolds rolling unexpectedly.
- Failures in safety devices like guardrails, nets, belts, lanyards, or lifelines.

Ensuring scaffolding systems meet Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards and are regularly inspected and maintained can significantly reduce the risk of system failures that endanger workers.

2. Environmental factors

Environmental factors are often spontaneous and unplanned, making them particularly dangerous. External forces such as wind, noise, or sudden temperature changes can catch workers off guard and throw them off balance. Weather-related conditions, like rain or ice, can also make scaffolding slippery and hazardous. Common environmental factors that contribute to scaffolding accidents include:

- Strong wind gusts.
- Explosions or sudden noise disturbances.
- Slippery surfaces due to rain, ice, or snow.
- Obstructions or falling debris.
- Exposure to asphyxiants or toxic fumes.

Employers should make workers aware of these hazards and provide appropriate safety measures, such as proper footwear, fall protection gear, and securing objects on scaffolds to prevent falls or collisions.

3. Human factors

Human factors often stem from negligence or a failure to recognize the risks associated with working at heights. Many scaffold-related accidents can be attributed to inadequate training, lack of proper personal protective equipment (PPE), or inattention to safety protocols. Common human errors include:

- Falling off scaffolding due to inattention or improper use.
- Drug or alcohol impairment, or illness affecting judgment.
- Incapacitation or physical limitations that affect balance.
- Lack of proper training on scaffolding use and fall protection.

Addressing human factors requires consistent training and education to ensure that workers understand the dangers associated with scaffolding and know how to use safety equipment correctly. Employers must provide proper training, adequate supervision, and enforce strict safety protocols to prevent accidents.

Other types of construction accidents involving scaffolding

While there are three main causes of scaffolding accidents, other types of accidents involving scaffolding occur on construction sites, as well. These include:

- **Electrocution.** Scaffolding placed too close to power lines can expose workers to the risk of electrocution. This is especially common when metal scaffolds are used near live wires.
- **Overloading.** When scaffolds are overloaded beyond their capacity with workers, materials, or tools, they can collapse, leading to serious accidents.
- **Falling materials and debris.** Workers below scaffolds are at risk of being struck by tools or materials dropped from above, causing injuries that could have been prevented with proper safety measures like toe boards or nets.
- **Falls during assembly or dismantling.** Workers assembling or dismantling scaffolds face unique hazards, as the structure may be incomplete or unstable during these phases.

Preventing scaffolding accidents with OSHA standards and safety measures

Many scaffold-related accidents can be prevented by complying with [New York's scaffolding law](#) and OSHA regulations, particularly [1926 Subpart L](#), which provides guidelines on scaffolding safety. These standards cover the design, installation, and use of scaffolds, as well as requirements for fall protection and worker training. Key safety requirements include:

- **Proper design and installation.** Scaffolds must be designed and erected by a qualified person, and each component must meet load-bearing specifications.
- **Fall protection.** Workers on scaffolds more than 10 feet above a lower level must be protected by guardrails or fall arrest systems.
- **Access and egress.** Safe access must be provided to all scaffolds, including ladders, stair towers, or ramps.
- **Inspection and maintenance.** Scaffolds must be inspected regularly by a competent person to identify any hazards or defects, and repairs must be made immediately to ensure safety.
- **Training.** Workers must be trained by a qualified person to recognize scaffolding hazards, proper use of scaffolds, and the appropriate fall protection methods.

By adhering to these standards and implementing a robust safety culture on construction sites, employers can significantly reduce the risk of scaffold-related accidents and protect their workers from serious injuries or fatalities.

What to do after a scaffolding accident in New York

Despite the best safety practices, scaffolding accidents still happen. [Workers injured](#) in these accidents are entitled to workers' compensation benefits, which are designed to cover medical expenses, lost wages, and rehabilitation costs while they recover. Workers' compensation is a no-fault system, meaning injured workers can receive benefits regardless of who caused the accident, making it a crucial resource for those dealing with the physical, emotional, and financial impact of a workplace injury.

After a scaffolding accident in New York, a worker can take the following steps to help protect their rights and strengthen their workers' compensation claim:

- **Seek immediate medical attention.** Injured workers should prioritize their health by seeking medical care as soon as possible. It's important to ensure that their injuries are properly documented, as medical records will be crucial to their workers' compensation claim.
- **Report the incident to your employer.** The worker should notify their employer about the accident as soon as possible, typically within 30 days. Failing to do so within this timeframe could jeopardize their ability to receive workers' compensation benefits.
- **Document the accident scene.** If able, an injured worker should take photos of the accident site, scaffolding, and any conditions that contributed to the incident. This can serve as important evidence if the claim is disputed or if negligence is involved.
- **Gather witness information.** If there were witnesses to the accident, an injured worker should collect their contact details. Their statements may be valuable if your claim faces challenges.
- **File a workers' compensation claim.** Once the injury has been reported to the employer, a worker can file their claim to begin receiving benefits for medical expenses and lost wages.
- **Consult a workers' compensation lawyer.** An experienced NYC workers' compensation lawyer can guide the injured worker through the claims process, handle disputes, and explore additional legal action if negligence or a third party was involved. These attorneys typically work on a [contingency fee](#) basis, meaning they only get paid if the worker receives compensation.

After a scaffold accident, the process of filing a workers' compensation claim in New York can be complex, especially when employers or their insurance companies dispute the claim or

attempt to minimize compensation. This is why it's important to contact an experienced workers' compensation lawyer as soon as possible after a construction site accident. A lawyer can help ensure that injured workers receive the full benefits they're entitled to, protect them from unfair treatment, and assist in navigating any disputes that arise. Additionally, if the accident was caused by the negligence of a [third party](#), a lawyer can explore the possibility of pursuing further compensation through a personal injury lawsuit.

Contact an experienced NYC workers' comp lawyer for help after a scaffolding accident

Workers' compensation benefits can provide much-needed financial relief, but navigating the system can be overwhelming, especially when dealing with an injury. A workers' compensation lawyer can take on the legal burden, allowing you to focus on your recovery while ensuring that your rights are fully protected.

If you or a loved one has been injured in a scaffolding accident in New York City, the experienced workers' compensation attorneys at [Pasternack Tilker Ziegler Walsh Stanton & Romano LLP](#) are here to help. Our team has decades of experience advocating for injured workers and ensuring they receive the compensation they deserve. We understand the complexities of scaffold-related injury claims and will fight for your rights every step of the way. Contact our firm today for a [free consultation](#) to discuss your case and learn how we can help you get the justice and financial support you need to recover.

*"Very helpful, very informative, and they go far and beyond to get you the money you deserve."
- Antonio*