Understanding OSHA:  
Proper Fall Protection When Working From Aerial Lifts

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) imposes the following fall-protection requirements on construction employers engaged in roofing work involving employees working from aerial lifts, pursuant to 29 C.F.R. § 1926.453(b)(2)(iv) and (v):

“Employees shall always stand firmly on the floor of the basket, and shall not sit or climb on the edge of the basket or use planks, ladders, or other devices for a work position.

A body belt shall be worn and a lanyard attached to the boom or basket when working from an aerial lift.”

Note: As of Jan. 1, 1998, body belts are not acceptable as part of a personal fall-arrest system. The use of a body belt in a tethering system or in a restraint system is acceptable.

To comply with this standard, foremen and superintendents must ensure employees do not stand on aerial lift guardrails to perform work. Foremen and superintendents also must choose one of the following fall-protection options for employees working from aerial lifts:

- Require use of a body belt with a tether anchored to the boom or basket (fall-restraint system)
- Require use of a body harness with a tether (fall-restraint system)
- Require use of a body harness with a lanyard (fall-arrest system)

When considering these options, it is important foremen and superintendents know the difference between a fall-restraint system and a fall-arrest system. A fall-restraint system prevents a worker from being exposed to any fall. A fall-arrest system exposes a worker to a fall but stops the fall within specified parameters. The following OSHA rules apply to fall-restraint and fall-arrest systems:

- If an employee is protected by a restraint system, either a body belt or harness may be used.
- If an employee is protected by a restraint system, ensure the lanyard and anchor are arranged so the employee is not potentially exposed to falling any distance.
- If the employee is protected by a fall-arrest system, a body harness must be used; use of a body belt is not permitted.
- A fall-arrest system only can be used where the aerial lift is designed to withstand the vertical and lateral loads caused by an arrested fall.
- It may be necessary to set up the fall-arrest system so the fall is limited to less than 6 feet to bring the arresting forces within the capabilities of some aerial lifts.
- If the arresting forces cannot be brought within the capabilities of the aerial lift, a restraint system must be used.