



**Announcer:**

It's time for the IHSA Safety Podcast.

**Ken Rayner:**

Welcome to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. I'm your host, Ken Rayner. In this episode, we're going to discuss falls from heights and the hazards that are associated with them, with Cindy Abbey from the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training, and Skills Development, and Scott Laing with the Infrastructure Health and Safety Association, IHSA. And this is our second podcast highlighting the Ministry's year-long education enforcement campaign on major system hazards. So why is falls from heights an important topic to discuss? Well, falls are a major cause of injury and death in Ontario workplaces, and the vast majority of these incidents are falls from heights even though the height may be no more than two or three metres.

So a big welcome to our guest today, Cindy Abbey, Provincial Specialist with the Construction Health and Safety Program at the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training, and Skills Development, who's going to educate and inform our listeners on the Ministry's focus with their falls from heights campaign. So great to have you on board, Cindy. And Scott Laing, IHSA's Coordinator of Research, Stakeholder, and Public Relations, who's going to direct our listeners to IHSA's free resources on addressing and controlling falls from heights hazards. So great to have you both here on the podcast.

**Scott Laing:**

Thanks, Ken. Looking forward to talking to everybody today.

**Ken Rayner:**

Okay. So thanks Scott. And Cindy, we're going to start the questions with you. I think we're going to go through a realm of who, what, when, where, how, and cover off all the details of this campaign. So Cindy, why don't we start and let us know a little bit about yourself and what your role at the Ministry is?

**Cindy Abbey:**

Certainly Ken, and thank you. I'm a Construction Health and Safety Specialist with the Ministry and I'm actually the lead for this falls campaign.

**Ken Rayner:**

Excellent. And I think we should probably share a bit of a disclaimer, Cindy, in that the information that we're going to share today doesn't replace what's listed in the Green Book or the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* or the applicable regulations. So for make sure that you're consulting your Green Book and the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* for the succinct information in regards to falls from heights. Well, let's start. Kick it off, Cindy, with you. Maybe provide us with a high level overview of what this campaign is all about.

**Cindy Abbey:**

Absolutely. The falls campaign is intended to increase awareness of falls from heights and hazards associated with falls from heights, along with precautions to prevent any falls from heights. It is also intended to promote the internal responsibility system and to increase compliance with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and its regulations.

**Ken Rayner:**

All right. So this campaign, when is it? Is it started? Are we already within it and when's it going to, Cindy?

**Cindy Abbey:**

This campaign is actually going to run for the full fiscal year, and it started on the 1st of April 2023 and it will run until the 31st of March 2024.

**Ken Rayner:**

Okay. A full-year campaign focus on working at heights. So obviously we know what's going on, when it's taking place. What about the pieces of legislation? So I mean, the Ministry just didn't make this up. I mean, there's legislation that employers have to follow when it comes to working from heights. So what are some of those high pieces of legislation that you're going to be focusing in on?

**Cindy Abbey:**

In terms of the internal responsibility system, for example, relative to falls awareness, the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* has some very specific responsibilities for constructors, employers, supervisors, and workers. In addition, inspectors will be focusing on the presence of a joint health and safety committee or a health and safety representative. But also regarding the *Regulation for Construction Projects*, inspectors will focus on fall protection requirements, for example, the hierarchy of controls, fall protection equipment being used, and the presence of guardrails. In addition, there are training requirements in the regulation for construction projects and specifically the working at heights training and site-specific fall protection training. We'll also be focusing on following manufacturers' instructions regarding equipment like any pieces of fall protection equipment. And then the other point I want to share is the fact that the *Occupational Health and Safety Awareness and Training Regulation* has a requirement for workers and supervisors to take basic health and safety awareness training, so that will be another component that inspectors will be looking at.

**Ken Rayner:**

Wow. Lots of focus there for the inspectors coming onto site. So we know this is running from April until March of next year. How about the, Cindy, how about some of the why's? Why is it, why is this so important? Why did the ministries choose falls to look at in regards to this initiative?

**Cindy Abbey:**

That's a good question. And in fact, through our analysis of hazards that have come to our attention, inspector enforcement activities over the last couple of years, there's a high incidence of falls experienced in single-family housing construction along with residential re-roofing, in addition to apartment and other multiple housing construction projects. So in determining based on statistical analysis of critical injuries and fatalities, in addition to a review of field visit activities, taking into account inspector orders, any tickets that have been issued represents part of our analysis. And this analysis process actually meets the requirements of the Ministry's Prevention Works five-year strategy by using the best evidence to target campaigns and measuring the performance of the campaigns in helping to decrease these types of incidents in the workplace.

**Ken Rayner:**

Excellent. So our listeners, members of the general public are probably familiar with reshingling and what that looks like. I mean, it goes on every summer, every spring, every fall in Ontario, you see homes that are being resingled. Now, you also mentioned something else that may not be as clear, Cindy, what is a single-family residential sector? What does that constitute in terms of the focus from the Ministry?

**Cindy Abbey:**

Single-family housing can include the types of single-family residential construction that you see when there is a new subdivision that's going into place. Another example would be a townhouse complex. By contrast, multiple housing projects typically refer to those construction projects used for residential purposes, but they tend to have more than six self-contained units.

**Ken Rayner:**

Okay. So we know the inspectors are coming on, they're focusing on single-family residential, they're focusing on reshingling. What exactly are those inspectors looking for, Cindy, when they come to these projects?

**Cindy Abbey:**

Well, Ken, when inspectors go out to construction projects in these particular areas for the purpose of the falls campaign, they'll be looking to verify whether residential housing construction projects are actually planned and organized to eliminate or reduce fall hazards when working at heights. In addition, they'll be looking at workplace parties having planned for fall protection equipment and emergency responses, plus that appropriate fall protection equipment is actually worn by workers as required. It's also worth noting that they'll be looking to verify that fall protection equipment is actually being used according to manufacturers' operating manuals or user instructions, and that workers working at heights have received WAH training, or working at heights training. But it's also worth noting that they'll be, the inspectors will be looking to verify that supervisors of workers working at heights have also received WAH training. I mentioned earlier about requirement for site or system specific fall protection training.

Inspectors will be looking to verify that that site-specific training has actually been provided. And what that means is, in a practical example, the use of a fall protection system and where anchors are located. Along with that, inspectors will be asking to see training records both for WAH and site-specific, but in

addition that workers and supervisors have, in fact, received the Occupational Health and Safety Awareness training. And just a couple of other points, Ken, that I want to share is that supervisors and workers in taking that awareness training, that there are records to demonstrate as such, and that I think generally in terms of the internal responsibility system, that supervisors meet competency, the competency definition to supervise workers who are in fact working at heights. And finally, as I mentioned earlier, that inspectors will be verifying the presence of joint health and safety committees if required, or health and safety representatives and if these folks are trained.

**Ken Rayner:**

Excellent. Okay. Cindy, maybe a follow-up question in regards to what the inspectors are looking for. So if I am running a project, I'm in charge and I see somebody walking towards me that I've never seen before, they're coming on, they appear to be coming onto the project, how do I know that they're an inspector? What should that inspector be saying to me? Can you sort of just walk me through a little bit of that? So I've got a bit of a sense as an employer, an inspector coming on site, what should I be prepared for?

**Cindy Abbey:**

Yes, an inspector will always wear a Ministry hard hat, and they're distinguished by the fact that they're blue and they've got the Ministry of Labour logo on the front of it. But certainly depending on the weather conditions, they'll be wearing a Ministry jacket of some sort. I think it's important also for the listeners to recognize that when there is a Ministry of Labour inspector onsite, that they will introduce themselves as such. They will either present a card, show their badge, but they'll make it readily apparent who their affiliation is with, the Ministry.

**Ken Rayner:**

Excellent. Thank you. And this is not about, the Ministry's not coming on these sites to do a "gotcha", right? The Ministry wants to help these workplaces achieve compliance. So maybe just, Cindy, can you share with us on that regard? How is the Ministry looking to help workplace parties meet their obligations and create a safe and healthy workplace?

**Cindy Abbey:**

Thank you for the question, Ken. And yes, among other things, the Ministry does have a website. It has a landing page for workplace health and safety where folks can get guidance on the *Occupational Health and Safety* Act and the regulations, the prevention works five-year strategy plan, information about the construction health and safety program, and key links to the key occupational health and safety hazards in the construction sector, including strategies and resources to help workplace parties control those hazards. So I would encourage listeners to check out that Ministry site. And also I want to take a moment to emphasize the fact that we rely extensively on the Infrastructure Health and Safety Association, and frequently we'll refer workplace parties to the IHSA for help.

**Ken Rayner:**

Excellent. Thank you for that, Cindy. And what a great time to bring on Scott Laing from IHSA. All right. So Scott, Cindy has shared with us sort of the who, the what, the where, the why. We may have some employers a little concerned that maybe they're not prepared for a inspector visit, but we know we've got lots of information and resources that can help them on our website, Scott. So what do you recommend can help the employers out there be compliant with falls from heights?

**Scott Laing:**

Well, the first thing is if they get onto our website, we offer tons of different resources to the construction, transportation, and electrical sectors so that they can comply with controlling hazards. But in addition, they can go above and beyond so that they improve their workplace health and safety practices. One of the things we do is we have a dedicated IHSA topic page full of tools, training products, and for this specific event, it's called Fall Protection and Working at Heights. So when you hit that topic page, we've got a number of amazing resources. One that comes to particular note is a *Working at Heights Quick Reference Guide*, kind of a pocket little booklet that's plasticized, gives us a quick reference on fall protection related incidents, contains how to recognize falls, inspecting equipment, calculating fall distances. They'll also find a fall protection work plan template, kind of a step-by-step guide for controlling hazards on the job site.

Kind of intended to use this kind of starting the discussion to figure out what I'm going to be doing for my fall protection. And that can take many different forms in place and aspects depending on the nature of the work. We also have sample rescue procedures. Anytime a worker could fall, we have to have written rescue procedures as per Section 26. We also have something that Cindy talked about, which is information site-specific training. And this is an elusive part of fall protection. Workers and employers and supervisors think I'm done when I just take working at heights, but that's just one part of the puzzle. The next thing we have to do is do site-specific training and understand that the gear I'm using is different from maybe the gear that was shared in the working at heights course so that I'm able to understand where my fall protection indicators are, how to wear it appropriately, the limitations.

In addition, we have a really nice guide on the top-10 worker causes of falling from Heights, something to think about and pull that information as to how does it reflect what I do, and then utilize it accordingly. So in order to help us support this initiative, we also want to highlight the fact that we developed a Fall Protection Toolkit. It contains additional resources. It's about 65 pages in length. It'll have site-specific safety talks, forms, checklists, articles, advisories, posters, all downloadable, all no charge. And these resources will help the employer develop, one, their site-specific training, but also to educate workers and supervisors how to protect themselves because we all have a role in maintaining a safe and healthy workplace. So with this fall prevention toolkit, it assigns kind of different topics, and I would say an employer could use them as they see fit.

But we've got one on just general fall protection related safety hazards. We've got falls from ladders. Slip, trips and falls, big one, especially as we just get out of the winter months. Falls from roofs and heights. And then a little bit on falling off a scaffold and suspended access. So we've developed, in addition to this toolkit, on-demand webinars as well as podcasts in which we will talk about working at heights, and all of them can be utilized to give that information to supervisors and workers. And so I'd encourage everyone to access these resources following IHSA's Fall Prevention and Working at Heights topic page. Really what we want them to do with all of this is how do we use it? So if we stopped and

took say 10 to 15 minutes to conduct an on point safety talk, I always like telling supervisors, if you're going to do a safety talk, what am I doing today?

So if I'm working on the roof, I'm going to talk about anchor points, I'm going to talk about the harnesses. If I'm building a guardrail, I might use the guardrail safety talk or bits and pieces from the toolkit in order to start the discussions, identify the hazards, any gaps in knowledge and training of the workers. And it keeps everybody on the job safe. The employer and the supervisor can also use this to expand and refresh their knowledge. I always find when I get in a room with a safety professional or a subject matter expert, I've been doing this 25 years, I still learn. I learn from subject matter experts. So any opportunities to take and pick someone's brain as to how do I do this more effectively or more efficiently and, bottom line, safely? Preventing falls can mean the difference between life and death. The employer has to prevent the death by planning the job safely, providing the right fall protection equipment, and then training.

And so we have our working at heights requirement, but then we have to pick up what am I using, how am I using it, how do I connect it, how do I anchor it? All those parts of the site-specific aspect. A fall can happen in a second. And the idea of the movies, I love lots of the movies that are out there right now in which it just looks like they're able to drop, tuck, and roll or they're able to grab on. And what we know is if a worker falls, they're on the ground. And then everything after that, the impact, the how far did they fall? We could have a fatality occurring from 30 feet, but we've also had workers pass away falling two and three feet, depending on the nature of the fall. So one more thing I want to highlight is that we have a bunch of safety manuals and guidelines.

These are easy to understand on various health and safety topics. We have a very comprehensive construction health and safety manual, as well as a safety talk manual with more than 140 subjects. So we want to call awareness to these fall-related hazards and incidents. And we want to encourage everyone to visit [ihsa.ca/safetytalks](https://ihsa.ca/safetytalks). And if you search for the section on falls, they'll be ready to go out of the box, take and use it right then and there. One thing I also want to say is that we do offer training. So we have the *Leading Edge* course taught by our IHSA experts, *Working at Heights*, as well as *Working at Heights Refresher*. And we offer these courses in various languages, so Cantonese, Mandarin, Polish, Russian, Spanish, to meet the industry needs. We have a lot more, so what I would encourage everyone is don't hesitate to reach out to IHSA and we can look into your local area and make sure that we can meet your needs with respect to offering just working at heights, but working at heights in the particular language of your workers.

**Ken Rayner:**

Scott, fantastic. Wow. That is just a plethora of resources that IHSA has. And I love the fact that you delved into some of the resources that, yes, you do come to IHSA facilities to take a working at heights class, but you also went into lots of other resources that employers can utilize from their office, their home, they can podcast, webinars, things they can download all on their own time. So there's just a great opportunity to leverage all kinds of different resources at IHSA. So thanks so much for sharing all those with us.

**Scott Laing:**

Yeah, you're welcome. One thing, if I may, Ken, is that we also have IHSA consultants who are experienced health and safety professionals. They're located throughout the province and they're able to answer some of these site-specific working at heights questions. These are leading, these are subject matter experts who have the experience and the knowledge to kind of help a company apply best practices. The hazards in front of you, you want to deal with it, but you're just not sure. And it's always important to take that opportunity. I've handled many a question myself. It could be just checking in. It could be, what do you think? It could be can you come on site and have a look at this? And I always like to engage in my local area by seeing it. Once we see what they're dealing with, we're then able to help them come up with a proper solution.

It could be more training, it could be a safety talk, it could be reading the manufacturers' instructions, very important, on using this particular piece of equipment. We can help out with that. And we can also help them develop and implement their health and safety policy and program and the specific needs of their workplace. And you can find our consultant contact information on our website, [ihsa.ca](http://ihsa.ca), under consulting, or you can contact the customer service department at 1-800-263-5024, and they'll put you in touch with your local consultant in the area, which you can then reach out and start to express how can you help me? And that's what we're here to do. And this is many times no charge for those little bits and pieces that we give. And then if the opportunity you want a little more, then we can discuss that with you as well.

**Ken Rayner:**

Great. Thank you very much, Scott. And encouragement to all of our listeners to stay abreast of all of the updates and what's going on with this year-long initiative. You can follow us on social media on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram, and we will be continuing to post updates regarding this initiative and this campaign on falls from heights as it goes on through the year. So thank you very much to Scott and to Cindy for being with us today to share the ins and outs of what to expect for the upcoming province-wide blitz initiative. So thank you very much to both of you for being here today. And thank you for listening to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. In this episode highlighting the Ministry's year-long campaign to address falls from heights, be sure to subscribe and like us on your podcast channel and visit us at [ihsa.ca](http://ihsa.ca) for a wealth of health and safety resources and information.

**Announcer:**

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