



DROPPED OBJECTS PREVENTION:

THE 8-STEP GUIDE FOR SAFETY PROS



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Like climbing ladders or stairs, there are steps to take to implement a dropped objects prevention plan on your jobsite. Regardless of industry, your roadmap to a successful dropped objects program should be:

1. Call to Action
2. Identify Risk & Define Scope
3. Observation/Site Assessment
4. Training
5. Controlled Implementation
6. Policy Creation
7. Launch
8. Review & Expand



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// IDENTIFYING THE RISK

First, an “aha!” moment occurs, a sudden bolt of recognition when a site safety manager, supervisor or someone else recognizes dropped objects as a potential hazard on their jobsite and decides to address them.

This call to action could be reactive in nature, a decision made after an injury or incident (near-miss, equipment damage, etc.) on the job. Or the potential of an accident/injury causes recognition of jobsite deficiencies and leads you to take a more proactive approach. Ideally, you have taken (or will take) a more proactive approach, identifying and addressing an at-heights safety concern before a costly incident occurs.

Once the effort is triggered, take time to identify the risk and define the scope of the hazard. Risk identification includes the Who, What, and Where of your environment:

- » **WHO:** Consider crew members at risk and think of how your crew's work may impact clients, customers, vendors, jobsites deliveries – even the public. Are any of those third-parties at risk when (not if) a tool or an object is dropped?
- » **WHAT:** The potential dropped objects or other unsafe objects (i.e., trip hazards) that should be managed.
- » **WHERE:** The at-heights areas on the jobsite where these risks present themselves, or have the potential to present themselves.

Defining your scope takes these elements and adds the When and How to determine your rollout plan:

- » **WHEN:** Determine a timeline to rollout a dropped objects program, and set goals within that timeline.
- » **HOW:** Consider what types of controls can be implemented and consider the Hierarchy of Controls (HOC) in your thought. More focus on the HOC will be given in later steps.

An additional part of the “How” and “When” is to define a pilot study for your program that will lead you to the third step of this process. Consider all the above and identify an area, site, and/or application where you want to start affecting change. This will be your pilot study. If one specific area has a higher risk level or frequent incidents, start your efforts there.

// COMMUNICATION AND SCHEDULING

Once you have identified your pilot study area, communication and focus on the objects in that job/area are important.

- » Notify the pilot area about the potential for dropped objects and the goals you have for a program. Ensure there is buy-in to be part of the pilot study.
- » Think about the kind of work being done in that area. Are there sensitive operations underway or sensitive equipment being used or worked on?
- » **Complete an inventory log** for all at-heights tools in this area. This should include any object or item that can fall such as tools, personal items, PPE and more.
- » Choose 6-10 tools from this inventory to be part of the pilot study. Pick the “usual suspects”, considering frequency of use and potential severity of damage if dropped.

Once your call to action is made and you've done an overall risk assessment of the jobsite and work within the jobsite, the stage is set through your pilot study to implement objects at heights management for your company.



A lot of planning and forethought goes into developing a thorough **dropped objects prevention plan**. But when you consider the potential cost of an accident, the time invested up front is more than worth it.



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// OBSERVATION/SITE ASSESSMENT

To assess a worksite, spend time monitoring at-heights work. This observation period will allow you to identify and analyze potential and actual safety hazards, which may vary from jobsite to jobsite. In part one of our series, we defined the scope by beginning with a pilot area to start your efforts. Concentrate your observations in this pilot area. This will give you more focus allowing you to perfect your observation skills on a smaller scale to start.



Once that's done, you can begin to work through the hierarchy of controls (HOC) to seek safety solutions for the pilot area. Consider [tethering and topping solutions](#), anchor points, clearance, and other challenges/competing hazards that may complicate your efforts. Be sure to document your discoveries and ideas, and file those away for future reference.

Think about levels other than the one on which you're standing. Dropped objects causes can originate on the ground before acceding to height or happen while at height. There are several factors that can lead to them, including:

- » Elements
- » Worker-generated situations

- » Poor housekeeping
- » Improper equipment transport
- » Site risks

// UNSAFE CONDITIONS

These are issues with physical items that are tangible and visible. Go around your worksite and think about clearance considerations; anchor points (but be sure to differentiate objects at heights and personnel fall anchor points); and tools and equipment like chemicals, rotating tools, etc. that are being used on the jobsite.

Establish a system to differentiate anchor points by color coding or tagging them another way. Are tool tethering anchor points available? Are they being improvised or misused? If they are not available, consider retrofit solutions that can be added. If there are stationary passive engineering controls like guardrails, nets, toeboards or others, inspect them and insure there are inspection practices in place for them.

// UNSAFE ACTS

Unlike unsafe conditions, unsafe acts are factors related to administrative controls, which aren't physical "things" that can be fixed.

These can include:

- » Work sequencing
- » The plan
- » Complacency
- » At-heights access for workers
- » Equipment transport

Fill out an [Objects at Heights Hazard Evaluation Form](#) and a Pre-Task Plan. This will help you organize your thoughts, and get decisions and events on record.



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// TRAINING

Set the stage by holding initial O@H training. There, you can identify workers whom you may want to be involved in a pilot study and other safety managers. Next, choose your workplace safety champions. These should be responsible colleagues whom you trust to follow the rules and set a positive example for their co-workers.

Two champions should be chosen:

Tools and installations leader:

- » Oversees tool crib
- » Manages tool inventory documentation
- » Reviews new tools entering job

Process & use leader:

- » Manages personnel doing job(s)
- » Identifies and marks anchor points
- » Considers other factors/competing hazards (i.e., ergonomics)

Other important safety roles/responsibilities that you can set up on your site may include:



It may be tempting to hurriedly implement a **dropped objects prevention program** after an incident occurs, but that can result in missteps and mistakes. Being methodical, analytical and thorough in detailing a plan is the only way to create real and meaningful change in your workplace safety culture.



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// CONTROLLED IMPLEMENTATION

Once you've observed your site and trained your workers, you're ready to roll out your **dropped objects plan** in the pilot area that you identified in steps two and three. Analyze your findings from the observation and assessment of your pilot area that you should have completed. **Utilize a Hazard Identification & Analysis tool** to document these observations. But you don't want to do this haphazardly and skip a step. Work through the hierarchy of controls to identify holistic controls based on your known hazards.

Can any hazards be outright eliminated? Or if not, can you substitute any unsafe conditions, equipment or materials to replace the hazard? If the answer is yes, then fix any unsafe conditions found. Examples include moving any unnecessary work at heights and setting up process on the ground, replacing corroded or damaged equipment and eliminating poor housekeeping.



If hazards cannot be eliminated or substituted, fix unsafe conditions around your worksite by establishing engineering controls. Utilize passive engineering controls, such as toe boards, netting or barricades. Also, establish active engineering controls using the **3T's (tethering, trapping or topping)** to address unsafe conditions that can't be fixed.

Implement administrative controls like policies and procedures, training and spreading awareness. Establish zones to require certain forms of PPE and administrative controls (i.e. Red Zones must use tool tethering and PPE; Yellow requires PPE only; and green are safe zones where neither is required).

Even though it is a last line of defense, PPE procedures must be established as well. Wearing hardhats, protective shoes and **eyewear** might seem like second nature, but make sure they are part of your entire plan.

// POLICY CREATION

After your pilot study has concluded, summarize your findings and freeze the processes you've put in place. This will be the foundation of your Objects at Heights Policy. Have your champions refer to a sample Objects at Heights Policy as they write yours. There are plenty of useful templates to reference out there. **Download our Objects at Heights Sample Policy Here.**

A complete policy should include:

- » Introduction
- » Scope
- » Responsibilities
- » Hazard Analysis, Risk Assessment and Task Planning
- » Worksite Inspection

Tedious though it may be, being thorough on the front end of your implementation will prevent you from having to go back and redo steps. And putting that policy in writing will give you (and your employees something to refer to (and will ensure your liability). A good policy should be firm yet flexible enough to allow for improvement happen in real time. Most importantly it should be something that everyone understands and agrees to abide by.



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// LAUNCH

After the first six steps are complete, you're ready to launch your new dropped objects prevention program. Bear in mind that it is a trial-and-error process, so you should anticipate that you will need to analyze and optimize the program once enough time has passed before you can expand it to the rest of your company.

Conduct safety training with your workers per your documented objects at heights policy. This should be an expanded group from your initial training in step 4 that involves personnel from other areas, locations and sub-contractors where appropriate. This will get a larger group involved and set the stage for the expansion discussed in step 8 of this roadmap.

Launching the program includes procurement and installation of your solutions. Accumulate the total number of tools that will be tethered at height based on your tool inventory log and purchase these solutions. Under the oversight of your **Tool & Equipment Champion**, install the safety solutions for the tools (large and small) that you will be using at heights. Decide which objects should be trapped, tethered or topped, and make sure each crew member feels comfortable doing so. It is helpful to overlap this with the larger scale training to get a variety of individuals comfortable with using and installing at-heights solutions.

// REVIEW & EXPAND

After a predetermined period, review how the program is working. Document changes and see if your goals are being met. You should expand it to other areas, jobs, tasks, tools, etc. only after you feel comfortable that any adjustments are modest in nature.

Remember, objects at heights controls must be implemented, maintained, and used correctly for them to be effective. Holistic management of an effective DROPS program means continuous assessment and improvement from safety managers and executives. Otherwise, people (and equipment) will remain at risk.

// OVERVIEW

A word of warning: Don't implement these policies on a wholesale basis. Attempting to roll out such detail-oriented change across the board on a large scale can lead to failure. Instead, introduce it to the most critical parts of your company or jobsite and expand the program once it has proven to be successful.

If you're ready to green-light program expansion, remember to patiently work through the hierarchy of controls to identify holistic controls based on the known hazards of each respective area.

For decades, the only dropped object safety program companies implemented involved hard hats and caution tape. Innovation has brought better mitigation within the hierarchy of controls to help **prevent dropped objects**. Like any safety program developed from scratch, there are a host of challenges along the way. Do not let those challenges or the excuse of "we've never had a struck-by accident before" keep you from delivering a safer work environment for your colleagues and friends. Use this eight-step roadmap to guide you and do not hesitate to lean on Ergodyne for support along the way.



MAKE THE WORKPLACE A BETTERPLACE.™

DROPPED OBJECTS PREVENTION: STILL WORK TO DO.

We realize starting your own safety program from scratch is hard work (we believe in you!). So keep this guide handy and know we're here to support you every step of the way when questions arise — all the way down to choosing the right objects at heights safety solutions.

Thank you for joining us in setting a higher standard in at-heights safety. Onward!

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