

Safety Net Systems

Safety Net Systems are one of the three types of fall arrest systems allowed in OSHA's Final Rule on Fall Protection (Subpart M). Safety nets must be installed as close as possible under the level on which employees are working, but never more than 30 feet below that level. When nets are used on bridges, the space through which an employee could fall from the walking/working surface to the net must remain unobstructed.

Safety nets shall extend outward from the outermost projection point of the work surface (refer to the new standard for the exact distance). The entire safety net system (the nets, all connectors, and the structures to which they are attached) must be capable of absorbing the impact of the drop test. The drop test consists of a 400 pound bag of sand dropped into the net from the highest point from which an employee could fall. The bag must be dropped from at least 42 inches above the net. The drop test must be performed when the system is installed, relocated, after major repairs, and at six-month intervals if it is left in one place.

Defective nets and components cannot be used and must be replaced immediately. Every safety net system has to be inspected at least once a week for wear, damage, and/or any other deterioration; they must also be inspected after any event that could effect the integrity of the system (examples include falls or snagging the net on a crane load).

Anything (materials, pieces of scrap, equipment, tools) which has fallen into the safety net has to be removed from the net as soon as possible and no later than before the next work shift. There are specific limits on the sizes of openings in the net mesh, and the spacing of connections between net panels - see the final rule for details.

A safety net system could save your life someday, but in order to do so it must be properly installed and carefully maintained. Take the time to notice how the system is anchored and if those anchors are secure. When something falls into the net remove it or arrange to have it removed as soon as possible. Keeping a jobsite safe is a team effort, but it also requires responsible individuals. Make sure that you take the responsibility to notice and correct dangerous situations - whether they involve safety nets or any other equipment.

