Guardrail and Safety Net Systems Summary

Guardrail and safety net systems are two ways to protect workers from falls on the job. If you are more than 6 feet above the lower surface, some type of fall protection must be used by your employer.

If your employer uses **guardrails:**

- Toprails must be at least ¼ inch thick to prevent cuts and lacerations; and they must be between 39 and 45 inches from the working surface;
- If wire rope is used, it must be flagged at least every six feet with highly visible materials;
- Midrails, screens or mesh must be installed when there are no walls at least 21 inches high. Screens and mesh must extend from the toprail to the working level.
- There can be no openings more than 19 inches;
- The toprail must withstand at least 200 lbs. of force; the midrail must withstand 150 lbs. of force;
- The system must be smooth enough to protect workers from cuts and getting their clothes snagged by the rail.
- If guardrails are used around holes at points of access, like a ladderway, a gate must be used to prevent someone from falling through the hole, or be offset so that a person cannot walk directly into the hole.

If your employer uses **safety nets:**

- The nets must be as close as practicable under the working surface, but never more than 30 feet below;
- The safety net must be inspected every week for damage;
- Each net must have a border rope with a minimum strength of 5,000 lbs.;
- The safety net must extend outward a sufficient distance, depending on how far the net is from the working surface (OSHA has a formula to follow);
- The safety net must absorb the force of a 400-pound bag of sand dropping on to the net (“the drop test”);
- Items in the net that could be dangerous must be removed as soon as possible.

*SOURCE:* Construction Safety & Health Fall Hazards, Central New York COSH, 2007, OSHA grant product