

Suspended ceiling entry

Going in over your head

Renovations to older buildings with suspended ceilings can pose health and safety hazards.

Above-ceiling spaces contain installations such as fireproofing, insulation, wiring, water and sprinkler piping, ventilation ducts, booster fans, phone and computer lines, and suspended T-bar hangers.

Each of these features can present hazards. Fireproofing and insulation probably involve the most significant health risks. In buildings constructed before the mid-1970s most insulation and fireproofing contained asbestos.

Asbestos

As asbestos deteriorates over time, a fine dust settles on top of ceiling panels and on equipment such as pipes, ducts, and fans in the ceiling cavity.

Unprotected workers entering a suspended ceiling risk exposure when they disturb and inhale this dust.

Building owners are required by law to advise contractors when asbestos is present in a building or other structure. But this information is not always readily available. When information on any older structure is lacking, assume that asbestos is present.



Precautions for entering suspended ceilings where asbestos may be present include respirators and protective clothing. Follow the procedures specified in the new regulation: *Asbestos on Construction Projects and in Buildings and Repair Operations* (O. Reg. 278/05).

In some cases the ceiling tiles themselves may contain asbestos. Again, the asbestos regulation specifies how to remove, handle, and otherwise work with such material. Refer to the regulation for the procedures to follow.

Electrical

Suspended ceilings have collapsed after workers entered the space above. Fixtures have crashed to the floor, exposing live electrical wiring and equipment. Consider a lockout procedure.

Circuits in older buildings may have been illegally modified over the years. Abandoned circuits may be left energized. Wiring and equipment can also deteriorate with age, overloading, or long-term vibration or abrasion.

All of these conditions can endanger workers entering a suspended ceiling.

Always consider any electrical wiring or appliance live unless a competent person has determined otherwise.

Electrocution isn't the only hazard from electrical contact. A shock can knock a worker off balance, resulting in a serious or even fatal fall.

Edges

Suspended ceiling hangers, T-bar joints, ductwork, pipe hangers, ceiling fixtures, and leftover or abandoned parts and fittings may all have sharp or ragged edges that can cause cuts or abrasions.

With adequate lighting, workers can spot these hazards and protect against them. Trying to work in a dark or poorly lit ceiling is not only frustrating but dangerous.

Access

Getting up into the ceiling can be hazardous. Never stand on the top step of a step ladder to reach the ceiling.

Wherever possible, use a scaffold or elevating work platform for safe and convenient access.

Don't rely on T-bars for support or balance. They may already be overloaded with additional lighting fixtures, additional wiring resting on the ceiling,

abandoned equipment, and weakened or missing hangers.

Leaning on a T-bar can bring down the whole system, seriously injuring workers.

Where personnel working above a ceiling are exposed to the risk of falling more than 3 metres (10 feet), or falling

- into operating machinery,
- onto a hazardous substance or object, or
- through an opening on a work surface,

they must wear fall-arrest equipment properly anchored and tied off. ■

RAYMAR

CONCRETE PUMPING • CRANES
BOOM TRUCKS • TELEBELT



24-hour Service

1-888-831-6428
www.raymarcranerental.com