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Clearance Distances Beneath Safety Nets

Safety nets are designed to deform or stretch when someone falls into them. It is therefore imperative that there is sufficient clearance below the safety net to allow for the net to deflect under load without the faller striking any objects beneath it.

The clearance distance required will depend upon the free fall height and the span of the net. The graph shown in Figure 1 shows the deflection of the safety net when the initial sag of the net is 5-10%. BS 8411: 2007 states "an additional safety zone (no less than 0.5m) should be considered for each application and where necessary discussed with the supplier or erector" (BSI, 2007). Safety nets should always be installed as close to the working level as reasonably practicable to minimise the fall height. The clearance distance is always measured from the height of the net supports / attachments, as shown in Figure 2.

It is important to remember that the clearance distance relates to objects that may be struck by the faller. It should always be ensured that the clearance distance is maintained, but in some circumstances, immovable objects such as structural steelwork may be present and a suitable and sufficient risk assessment should be completed to minimise this risk.

In UK construction it is generally acceptable to work to a rule of thumb clearance of 3m as shown in Figure 2, however the chart in Figure 1 should always be consulted.

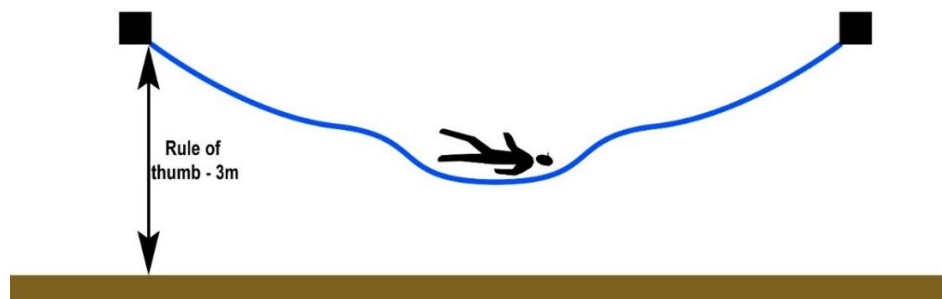


Figure 2. Rule of thumb clearance distance.

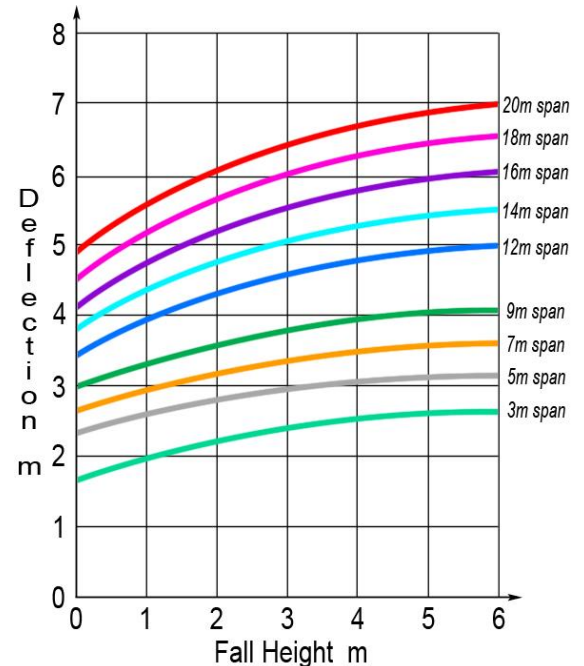


Figure 1. Deflection distance chart.

Note: the span of the net is its shortest side.

References:

BSI (British Standards Institution). 2007. *BS 8411: Code of practice for safety nets on construction sites and other works*. London: BSI.

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