Dangerous Edges — study guide

An unguarded edge or opening is one of the oldest ways to die on board, and it is entirely preventable. This guide covers planning, PPE, rules and habits that keep work safe near dangerous edges.[1]

Planning the task

When planning any work task, crew members should consider the safety measures that can be put in place to prevent accidents, the areas on board where crew members are more likely to be exposed to dangerous edges or unguarded openings, and any improvements that can be made to shipboard procedures to reduce the likelihood of future accidents.

PPE for work at height

When working aloft, outboard, or in any location where there is a risk of falling, an additional item of PPE is required: a **safety harness or a safety belt with a shock absorber**.

Guarding openings

Any opening, hatch or edge from which a crew member could fall — **other than a permanent access way** — should be fitted with a secure guard, barrier or fencing.

Exposure to dangerous edges

To stay safe while working close to unguarded openings and dangerous edges, carry out a thorough risk assessment, maintain good situational awareness, wear the correct PPE, and comply with the relevant regulations.

Building a safety culture

A strong safety culture on board is encouraged by participating fully during toolbox talks and safety briefings, and by contributing ideas for improvements — an active crew catches hazards before they become accidents.

Key facts to remember

- Plan for edges: safety measures, known danger areas, and procedure improvements.
- Work at height/outboard → safety harness or safety belt with a shock absorber.
- Any fall-risk opening/hatch/edge (except a permanent access way) needs a secure guard, barrier or fencing.
- Near edges: risk assessment, situational awareness, correct PPE, comply with regulations.
- Safety culture: join toolbox talks and briefings, and contribute improvement ideas.

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Sources

1. Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seafarers (COSWP) — Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) (working at height, protection of openings and edges).