Picture This: Not So Great Moments in Hole Covers



Open holes and openings have been to blame for countless injuries and deaths on the job. The only thing that is worse than an uncovered, unguarded, or unprotected floor or wall hole or opening, is one that is “guarded” or “covered” with an inadequate cover. When we see a cover over an opening we almost always assume it’s safe. Safe for us to walk over, drive equipment over, stand or sit on. A shoddy cover and a false sense of security is a deadly combination.

In this image, it’s obvious the cover is in questionable condition, but I bet if you waited long enough, you’d see someone standing on it.

Here’s what you need to know about holes, openings, and covers:

1. As soon as a hole or opening is created it must be protected with a cover, or workers must be protected by fall protection (when applicable). There’s no grace period – brevity of exposure to a hazard is not an excuse or a defense for failing to protect against it.
2. If you make a hole, guard it. Even before that – barricade the area to keep people out prior to making the hole, exposing a hole or opening (i.e. manhole).
3. If the hole must remain open, then it must be guarded with permanent barricades around the perimeter.
4. If the hole can’t be or isn’t guarded, it must be covered. The cover must be capable of supporting certain load limits. Check with applicable safety rules for specifics in your area.
5. Don’t use paper, cardboard, or plastic to cover holes. It’s been done before. It does not end well.
6. NEVER sit or stand on skylights. They are not designed to support you. Don’t leave skylight openings unprotected during install either. They must be properly barricaded, guarded, or otherwise protected.
7. If you see an uncovered or unprotected opening or hole, immediately barricade it or post someone to warn others and notify your supervisor to correct the hazard.

