

# Temporary Stairway and Ramp Accidents on NYC Construction Projects

## Experienced workers' compensation attorneys fighting for injured New Yorkers

If you've ever rushed up a wobbly metal stair tower or stepped onto a slick temporary ramp in mid-Manhattan, you know the nervous feeling of realizing your safety depends on a structure that looks like it was "put here yesterday and could be gone tomorrow."

Temporary stairways and ramps are supposed to be an easy, safe way to move between levels on a New York construction site. All too often, they turn into unexpected trip-hazard hotspots. In high-rise, mixed-use, and infrastructure projects across NYC, workers hurt on these structures often end up with broken bones, spinal injuries, or long-term disability.

Here's why temporary stairs and ramps become so dangerous, what safety rules are supposed to be in place, and how [injured workers](#) can hold owners and contractors accountable when a shaky stair or slippery ramp leads to a fall.

## What are temporary stairways and ramps in NYC construction?

On a typical NYC construction project, permanent stairs either don't exist yet or aren't safe to use. That's where temporary structures come in, including:

- Free-standing metal stair towers
- Prefabricated modular stair systems
- Custom-built wooden stairs
- Ramps used to move equipment or materials

These routes are meant to serve as reliable vertical and horizontal access for workers, tools, and carts until the building is finished and the permanent egress is open and certified.

In practice, temporary stairs and ramps are often erected quickly, reused from one job to the next, and inspected only when something goes wrong. General contractors and subcontractors may treat them as "necessary but not glamorous" pieces of the site, which means small defects (e.g., loose treads, missing handrails, oily surfaces) can linger without being fixed. Because these structures are constantly busy, even a minor flaw can quickly become a major hazard under the weight of dozens of daily trips.

## Why are these temporary structures so risky?

There are a few reasons why temporary stairways and ramps tend to be hotspots for work accidents in NYC:

- They are often the first piece of a project to be installed and the last to be properly maintained. A stair that looked solid on day one can sag, warp, or loosen over weeks of use, especially if the frame is made of wood or if the bolts are exposed to moisture and vibration.

- They're frequently shared between workers and material carts, which means the structure is subjected to uneven and sometimes heavier loads than it was designed for.
- Workers use ramps as if they were stairs, avoid handrails to carry bigger loads, or ignore that one "sloppy" step at the bottom of the flight.

When combined with rushing, fatigue, and poor lighting, these habits can turn a small defect into a serious fall. The fact that the law often treats temporary stairs as elevation-related structures means falls from them can be both physically and legally high-stakes.

### **What safety rules apply to temporary stairs on NYC sites?**

[OSHA's 1926.1052](#) regulations require that any stairway rising more than 30 inches above the lower level have handrails and guardrails on the open sides, along with a minimum 3-foot width, uniform rise and run of treads, and slip-resistant, debris-free surfaces. Stair landings must be clear and well-lit, especially in multi-story or scaffold-adjacent configurations.

[New York's Industrial Code Part 23](#) reinforces many of these rules, mandating that temporary stairways be built with sturdy treads (wood or metal), at least 3 feet wide, and with guardrails on all open sides. The code also limits how far workers must go vertically between landings before a rest platform is required and sets standards for handrail height and strength.

In NYC, these rules overlap with the Department of Buildings' "[Safeguards During Construction or Demolition](#)" chapter, which further explains how temporary structures must be designed, inspected, and maintained on active sites.

### **What common defects cause falls from temporary stairs?**

Many temporary stair accidents don't happen because of a single, dramatic failure. Instead, they result from a slow-moving combination of small defects that were never fixed. Some of the most common problems include:

- Missing or defective handrails and guardrails on open sides, which can leave workers with nothing to grab if they start to fall.
- Uneven or irregular treads, where one step is slightly taller or shorter than the others, causing workers to catch the front of their boot and trip.
- Split, cracked, or warped wooden treads that give underfoot, or metal treads that are oily, rusty, or painted with a slick coating.
- Loose bolts, wobbly frames, or inadequate bracing that make the entire stair tower sway or shift when someone walks on it.
- Tools, scrap, or debris left on the stairs overnight or between shifts, which creates tripping points.
- Wet, icy, or oily surfaces from weather, spills, or improper cleaning.
- Poor or missing lighting at landings, which makes it hard to see the next step or judge the depth of a drop.

Even if the fall is only a few feet, the suddenness of a trip on a temporary structure (especially when the worker is carrying a heavy load) can lead to broken ankles, spiral fractures, wrist or arm injuries, or, in the worst cases, spinal or head trauma.

### **How can ramp design and misuse make accidents more likely?**

Ramps on NYC construction sites are often built for moving equipment or carts rather than foot traffic, but workers end up using them as stairs anyway. When that happens, the mismatch between design and use becomes a serious problem. Many ramps are steeper than ideal for people walking, lack proper handrails or edge protection, and have slippery or oily surfaces from machinery or hydraulic leaks.

Common ramp-related hazards include:

- Excessive slope that makes it hard to maintain footing or control a cart, especially when the surface is wet or greasy.
- Missing edge rails or kerbs that allow carts or feet to slip off the sides on elevated ramps.
- Slippery or greasy surfaces from spills, rain, or equipment fluids.
- Inadequate anchoring or “belly” in the ramp that causes it to sag or move under foot.
- Lack of anti-slip framing or metal strips on the tread surface, which is particularly dangerous in a construction environment.
- Overloading or uneven stress from combined pedestrian and equipment use, increasing the risk of collapse or destabilization.

### **What kinds of injuries are common in stair and ramp accidents?**

Falls from temporary stairs and ramps can cause a range of injuries, from seemingly minor sprains to life-changing trauma. The severity often depends on the height, surface conditions, and how the worker lands. Common injuries include:

- Ankle twists, sprains, and fractures from slipping on slick or uneven treads.
- Spiral fractures of the tibia and broken wrists or arms from trip-and-falls.
- Head injuries and concussions if the worker strikes a step, railing, or nearby structure.
- Spinal-column injuries and internal trauma from falling several stories down a stair tower or off an elevated ramp.
- Permanent disability, chronic pain, or loss of mobility in severe cases.
- Long-term medical treatment needs, lost wages, and extended rehabilitation, even when injuries seem “minor” at first.

### **What evidence should you gather after a stair or ramp accident?**

Immediately after a fall, it’s important to gather as much information as possible, while memories are fresh and the scene is still intact. If you’re able, take photos and videos of:

- The stair or ramp from multiple angles, including the landing, treads, and guardrails.

- Any visible damage, loose bolts, missing steps, or puddles of liquid on the surface.
- Debris, tools, or materials left on the stairs.
- Warning signs, barricades, or lack thereof.

Ask witnesses for their names and contact information, and, if possible, write down brief notes about what happened while your memory is sharp. Later, request copies of the incident report, any DOB construction-accident report, and related OSHA or safety-committee records. Make sure your medical records clearly state that you fell from a temporary stair or ramp, including the height and nature of the fall, so that doctors' notes support your later legal claims.

### **Hurt on temporary stairs at work? Talk to a NY workers' comp lawyer**

If you were injured on temporary stairs at a New York job site, you're likely dealing with pain, time off work, and a lot of unanswered questions about your rights. [Pasternack Tilker Ziegler Walsh Stanton & Romano LLP](#) can take the incident report, photos, safety logs, and medical records from your stair accident and turn them into a strong workers' compensation case that explains exactly how unsafe temporary stairs, missing treads, bad lighting, or lack of railings contributed to your fall.

Our law firm represents injured workers across New York City, Long Island, Westchester, Rockland, and Upstate New York. We offer free consultations, so you can speak directly with a knowledgeable workers' comp lawyer about your temporary stair accident without paying anything upfront. Because we work on a contingency fee basis, you don't owe attorney's fees unless we win benefits or a settlement for you, which lets you focus on healing instead of worrying about legal bills.

[Contact us](#) today to set up your free, confidential consultation with a lawyer who knows New York's workers' compensation law.