



Reassess your

FALL PROTECTION PROGRAM



Time and effort spent now can pay off down the road

By MICHAEL STODDARD

Anyone who has ever fallen knows the instant feeling of panic and loss of control that takes over in the first few seconds. Unfortunately, it only takes those few seconds to fall, but the resulting serious injuries may last a lifetime.

In fact, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that more than 250,000 workers are injured each year in workplace falls; results range from minor cuts and abrasions to death. The Department of Labor also lists falls as a leading cause of traumatic death, accounting for nearly 8 percent of such deaths. Even more startling, approximately one-third of all construction deaths are caused by falling from heights.

Clearly, fall protection equipment should require more thought than just another line item on a spreadsheet. Fall protection programs need peri-

odic reevaluation to ensure all regulations and current standards are being met. Companies plagued by recurring workplace injuries caused by falls must reassess their fall protection programs. Similarly, organizations not in compliance with the American National Standards Institute *Safety Requirements for Personal Fall Arrest Systems, Subsystems, and Components (Performance Standard ANSI Z359.1)* should take a critical look at their safety program and fall protection equipment.

Evaluating your program

Fall protection must be used any time a worker is at a height of at least four feet in general industry settings, five feet in maritime settings, and six feet in construction settings. Regardless of the fall distance, fall protection must be provided to those working over machinery or dangerous equipment.

Help your employees by identifying

potential fall hazards in the workplace caused by both routine and non-routine tasks. Eliminating hazards should be a top priority, although it is not always practical or feasible. Consider contacting and teaming up with similar companies to share best practices and compare fall prevention solutions.

All employees in danger of falling should undergo fall protection training regularly. Your company's training course should identify specific hazards and familiarize employees with all fall protection equipment used in the workforce. A review of the written fall prevention and rescue plan will help assure employees that help is never far away. Document training courses and employee participation.

As fall protection equipment is brought into the workplace, its age and condition should be documented. Prior to use, the equipment should be inspected according to the manufacturer's recommendations and OSHA requirements. It is important

FALL ARREST EQUIPMENT: Remember your ABCs

A is for the ANCHOR POINT. Something has to keep you safely suspended in air. Federal law requires an anchor point that is structurally sound, good for a static force of 5,000 lbs. Some options are permanent or reusable anchors that can be attached to roof decks or steel beams.

B is for the BODY HARNESS. The harness straps around your chest, buttocks and thighs. Newer fabrics make the webbing stretchable providing for a more comfortable fit. In the event of a fall, you would be suspended upright and intact.

C is for the CONNECTING DEVICE. This connects the body harness to the anchor point. Generally, these are referred to as shock-absorbing lanyards, or self-retractable lifelines. An important part of the connecting device is the locking snap hook. Locking snap hooks are required by federal law to prevent "roll out," which has resulted in fatalities when the snap hook has become disengaged from the anchor point.

Source: University of Virginia, Office of Environmental Health & Safety

that your safety team stays current with standards and laws regulating fall protection as stipulated by OSHA; visit www.osha.gov for more information.

Purchasing equipment

In recent years, fall protection equipment has changed drastically to meet more stringent safety standards. Manufacturers are responding to customer feedback, and new fall protection equipment is more user-friendly and comfortable than ever before. (See "New products in fall protection" sidebar.)

When purchasing fall protection equipment, consider the following important factors:

► Choose a trusted and knowledgeable safety equipment distributor. Ask yourself:

1. Does the distributor specialize in a breadth of safety products and have specific expertise in fall protection?
2. Can the distributor help assess your specific needs and workplace hazards?
3. Is the distributor knowledgeable about current OSHA regulations?

► What are the inherent hazards of the workplace? How will that impact the equip-

ment needed? Can the hazards be eliminated or engineered out? The use of approved guardrails, safety netting, equipped man-lifts and scaffolding are some viable alternatives to consider to achieve a safer workplace for the employee.

► Evaluate the credibility and reputation of the equipment manufacturer. Ask yourself:

1. Are the products made in an ISO 9001-certified facility?
2. Does the manufacturer utilize third-party product testing?
3. Is the manufacturer compliant with ANSI Z359.1?

► Ensure employee compliance with the company's fall protection program. How can you help improve compliance? Look for equipment that is comfortable and ergonomically designed, as well as functional for your specific workplace.

Getting help

Safety equipment distributors can help companies — large or small — evaluate their fall protection programs and incorporate new equipment, as well as new training, into their programs. Safety distributors also can help guide companies through a process that facilitates a top-down management approach in supporting and encouraging employees to embrace the fall protection program. From emphasizing the benefits of wearing proper equipment to involving employees in gear discussions at an early stage, safety distributors can help managers establish a safety culture.

Instilling a 100-percent safety philosophy in all employees should be top priority. Negative effects of not wearing proper fall protection — or not wearing any fall protection — are real and extreme. Although researching, planning and wearing fall protection equipment certainly requires time, the seconds it takes to fall are more costly to a company's bottom line than any form of preparation.

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New products in FALL PROTECTION

► DOUBLE-LEGGED RETRACTABLE LANYARDS

reduce free fall, minimize the risk of potential impalement and compact, as well as reduce forces generated on the body.

► You can increase worker production and safety, decrease installation time and simplify set-up and take-down with **HORIZONTAL RETRACTABLE LIFELINES**. This new design is more apt to have accurate installation as it provides anchor points and a structure that meets a 5,000-pound rating.

► **100% TIE-OFF PRODUCTS** can be attached directly to the webbing of a harness while freeing up the dorsal "D" ring; this allows the use of additional connectors to keep the worker in compliance.

► New **HYDRATION SYSTEMS FOR HARNESS USERS** enhance workers' performance while addressing dehydration issues.

► With new **DOWNLOADABLE IR TRACKING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS**, users can keep track of inventory, employee training records, product inspection records and more when traveling. The software also assists with theft deterrence and regulatory compliance.

► Designed to reduce pressure on the femoral artery, aid in rescue, and work with the majority of harnesses manufactured today, **SUSPENSION TRAUMA STRAPS** are also simple to use and deploy.

► New **SPECIALTY LANYARDS** can be connected back in to themselves when anchor accessories are not available or are not applicable.

► **PERMANENT ROOFTOP ANCHORS** have built-in shock absorption devices incorporated in the base of the unit that distribute the forces generated during a fall to preserve the structural integrity of the roof.

► Under the newest revision of ANSI Z359.1 (rev. 2007), standard hardware, such as **SNAP HOOKS, REBAR HOOKS and CARABINERS**, will have a new rating of 3,600 pounds regarding forces generated on the "GATE." Currently, these products only need to meet 220 pounds on side impact and 350 pounds on front impact.

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