>> Toolbox Talk

Who needs fall protection equipment?

If you said workers building bridges or cleaning office towers, you would be right. But what about all the workers who work at lesser heights, just a few feet off the ground? They should also be protected from falls, which can be every bit as fatal.

Consider your work area. Are there locations from which someone could fall? What sort of protection is in place to prevent a fall? And is there equipment to stop a fall?

As per section 141 of the Newfoundland and Labrador Occupational Health & Safety Regulations, where a worker is exposed to a fall: 3 meters or more above the nearest safe surface or water; above a surface or thing that could cause injury to the worker if the worker were to fall on the surface or thing; or above an open pit, tank or vat containing hazardous material, the employer shall ensure the worker is utilizing the appropriate form of fall protection. Additionally, as per section 142 (10) (a) & (b), employers shall have a fall protection plan in place.

Types of fall protection equipment

There are several types of fall protection equipment available including fall arrest, travel restraints and guardrails.

It is important to understand the difference between a fall arrest system and travel restraint system. These are commonly used in the construction industry, but may apply to many other situations where employees must work at heights.

A worker may be required to wear a fall arrest system. A fall arrest system consists of a full body harness and a lanyard with a shock absorber. The fall arrest equipment may be attached directly to an anchorage or connected to an anchored lifeline.

Where guardrails have not been provided, a restraint system may be used to restrict a worker's travel distance and prevents them from getting too close to the roof edge. Travel restraint equipment is comprised of an anchored life line or lanyard that attaches to the worker's harness.

Guardrails are commonly used on construction sites, as they are a convenient means of protecting workers. Guardrails protect roof openings and the roof edge. Guardrails must be attached to the edge or as close to the open edge as possible. If rails must be removed for material handling, fall restraint equipment must be worn by the exposed worker(s).

Inspections

- Thoroughly inspect all nylon webbing for frayed edges, broken fibers, burn marks, deterioration or other visible signs of damage. Stitching should be intact and not torn or loose.

-Check to see that buckles and D-rings are not distorted or damaged. Look closely at all components for stress cracks, deformity, gouging, corrosion and sharp edges. Inspect connection points where the buckle or D-ring is attached to the harness. Insure that no stitching is pulled and that the buckle or D-ring is securely attached.

-Inspect all rivets and grommets to be certain they are not deformed, and are securely fastened to the harness and cannot be pulled loose.

-If using a shock absorber type of lanyard, look for the warning tag which indicates that the lanyard has been exposed to a fall.

-Snap hooks and eyes should not be distorted or bent. Inspect them for cracks, sharp edges, gouges or corrosion. Check to be sure the locking mechanism is operating properly and that there is no binding of the mechanism.

-Test the locking mechanism by pulling sharply on the cable end to be sure it locks immediately and firm

If you find any of these conditions during the inspection, do not use the equipment.

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