

The ABCDs of Fall Safety

By Rick Pedley | Sunday, September 26, 2021

Safety , OSHA , Risk Management , Equipment , Safety Best Practices

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With trips and falls being the most common type of workplace injury, contractors need to consider a wide range of factors when protecting their workers. According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, fall protection “shall be provided at elevations of four feet in general industry workplaces, five feet in shipyards, six feet in the construction industry and eight feet in longshoring operations.” This includes a wide range of worksites and environments, which come with their own risks and considerations. It is important to mitigate the potential for injury regardless of industry.

However, fall safety is about more than just wearing a safety harness. That’s why many professionals rely on what are known as the ABCDs of Fall Safety. Each category outlines a specific hazard or area of concern that every safety manager should be aware of.

The ABCDs of Fall Safety was designed to help contractors remember what it means to keep employees safe on the job. Every member of the team should be aware of this information so they don’t leave anything to chance. Contractors with employees working on elevated surfaces can use these tips to make sure their employees are using the right fall safety equipment.

ANCHORS AND CARABINERS

Anchors are designed to offer workers and teams secure tie-off points, which provide the first link in the fall protection chain. Anchors are typically made with high-quality steel or other metal. They are often attached directly to the structure the person is working on. If the person were to fall unexpectedly, the anchor will be their first line of defense.



Fall safety anchors come in all shapes and sizes, so contractors need to make sure they are using the right type for the task at hand. Some may include a small clip, while others may use wall anchors or sliding beam anchors for added protection, swivel hooks for added mobility or cross arm straps. Managers should research these different types of anchors to find the right one for their team.

Anchors may rust or lose their efficacy over time. Contractor and individual workers must inspect their anchors before working on elevated surfaces. Everyone needs to watch out for loose connections and sub-standard materials that might not hold up under pressure.

BODY SUPPORT

Body support usually comes in the form of a full-body harness. Anchors won't protect workers from the fall unless they are attached to a full-body harness. The harness distributes the weight of the fall across the person's body, including the thighs, waist, chest and shoulders.

If a worker falls, the harness must arrest the fall without injuring the worker in the process. For workers in situations where there is even the possibility of a fall, they must use a full body harness. Waist belts or other similar devices will cause serious injury or even death. For this reason, they are prohibited as a means of fall protection, and may be used for work positioning only.

Managers should look for a full-body harness that wraps around the shoulders, chest and inner thighs for maximum fall protection. It should include a range of secure straps and buckles that should fit comfortably around the person's body. The harness shouldn't feel too tight or loose, or it may be ineffective on the job. Workers should also be able to clip tools and equipment to their fall harness for fast access when they are working in the air.

CONNECTORS AND LIFELINES

Connectors attach the anchor to the full-body harness, so everything works in tandem in the event of a fall. The most common types are lanyards and self-retracting lifelines. They come in many different styles, depending on how much the person may need to move on the job. For example, certain brands and connectors come with self-retracting lines that allow workers to quickly move up and down vertical lines of rope, so they can zip from one area to the next.

Connectors and lifelines help workers come to a stop safely and comfortably in the event of a fall, instead of catching them all at once. essentially all industry-standard connectors come with built-in shock absorbers to help dissipate the energy from a fall. Fall protection lanyards are made with a variety of styles when it comes to the inner workings. But all are made with the intent of reducing the sudden shock by controlled braking of the fall.

DESCENT AND RESCUE

Some professionals just stick to the ABCs of Fall Safety, but it's important to include the "D," which stands for "descent and rescue." These systems are designed to help teams safely lower employees to the ground in the event of a fall. Common fall protection harnesses and lanyards do their job by bringing workers safely to a halt after a fall. But that leaves the worker hanging in space. This may be a few feet off the ground or many stories up in the air.

Managers should avoid leaving their workers floating up in the air. OSHA identified that suspension trauma could be fatal within 30 minutes of the initial fall. This 30-minute window is what OSHA refers to when it says that a fall protection plan must contain plans for a "prompt" rescue.

Some harness manufacturers have developed built-in descent lines into their designs. This facilitates either a self-rescue or an assisted one if the worker is unconscious. For fast retrieval, managers and contractors should use descent and rescue systems that can be deployed quickly in the field. Workers shouldn't have to wait for a rescue squad to arrive.

The ABCDs of Fall Safety are designed to keep teams in the know when it comes to fall safety. Managers and contractors should use this fall protection equipment to keep their workers safe from the hazards of working at height.




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Rick Pedley joined the family business in 1979. PK Safety, a supplier of occupational safety and personal protective equipment and manufacturer of its own new FR line GRIT, has been operating since 1947 and takes OSHA, ANSI, PPE and CSA work safety equipment seriously.

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