

Personal Fall Protection Systems

Toolbox Talk

If you are an employee who works at elevated levels six feet or more above lower levels that are not protected by handrails or safety nets, you must wear a personal fall protection device. You must also wear a personal fall protection device when you're working on suspended scaffolds that have only one or two suspension points. Federal regulations also prescribe requirements on the use of a personal fall protection device on other types of scaffolds. The personal fall protection device is the only thing between you and possible death or serious injury if you should happen to fall.

What do we mean by a personal fall protection device?

A personal fall protection system includes a harness you wear around yourself, a lanyard with a deceleration device and a substantial anchorage. If your job requires that you move between anchor points, (such as climbing a ladder on a communications tower) you should wear two lanyards. Attach to the point you are moving toward before unhooking the second lanyard from the previous anchor point. This way, you are constantly protected.

Inspect Harness Before Each Use

To ensure maximum protection from personal protective equipment, you must inspect and maintain it, not just wear it.

- Inspect your fall protection device and hardware per manufacturer's inspection guidelines before each use to be sure there are no defects.
- Inspect the harness for frays, cuts, or other damage.
- If you do any welding, inspect for burns from spatter or sparks.
- Inspect the tongue end of the harness for wear caused by buckling and unbuckling, for worn and missing grommets, and for wear or damage where the buckle is attached to the harness.
- Inspect the buckle for distortion. The buckle tongue must move freely and overlap the buckle frame.

- Inspect the roller for distortion and sharp edges. It should turn freely on the buckle frame.
- Make sure D-rings are free of breaks, cracks, or rough edges and that they move freely.
- Inspect rivets for cracks and burrs. A bent rivet may fail under stress.

Lanyards

Lanyards with a deceleration device should be nylon rope or equivalent with a minimum of one-half inch diameter and 5,000-pound breaking strength. They should be tied off to an anchoring device of equal strength so that if you should fall, you won't drop more than six feet. As with all other portions of the device, lanyards should be inspected end-to-end before each use.

- Look for burrs and for worn, broken, or cut fibers.
- Inspect snap hooks for distortion of the bill and eye sections and for cracks and corroded or pitted surfaces.
- The keeper latch should seat into the bill without binding, and should not be distorted. The spring should have enough tension to close the keeper.

If any part of the system fails inspection, it must be removed from service immediately. Before disposing of it, destroy it to avoid other people using it.

Care and Maintenance

Don't allow acids, caustics, or other corrosive materials to come into contact with fall protection devices, lanyards, or lifelines. Avoid dropping devices on the ground and keep them away from sharp tools or objects. Cutting or rough punching extra holes in a device can weaken it, as well as void the manufacturer's warranty. Never use gasoline or other drying solvents on any harness. Instead, lightly coat leather products with leather conditioners such as saddle soap. Be careful of products that contain ingredients such as neatsfoot oil, which may degrade the stitching. For fabric harnesses, use only the special dressing recommended by the manufacturer. Store all harnesses in separate, dry compartments or hang them up so they won't be damaged.

