



Toolbox Talk

Suspended Scaffold Fall Protection

Would you go skydiving without a reserve chute? Would you go scuba diving without a buddy? Hopefully, the answer to both questions is no. Why? Because if your primary support system fails, you need a back-up to save your life. The same is true when working from suspended scaffolding.

When working from a suspended scaffold, your primary life support system is the planking, railings and rigging. However, even the best designed systems are capable of failing. If a suspended scaffold fails, you can free-fall to serious injury or death. For this reason, a back-up system makes good sense and is required by law. The following are the major points to be considered in setting up your back-up fall protection system:

- The point of attachment for the lifeline must be capable of withstanding 5000 pounds of force and be rigged such that you cannot free fall more than 6 feet.
- A full-body harness must be used. A harness will distribute the shock load over several points of your body, reducing the likelihood of additional injury if you were to fall. A single belt around your waist is not permitted.
- The lanyard from the harness must connect with an independent lifeline. In other words, the lanyard must not be attached to the scaffolding or any of its supporting members or rigging. You want to be completely independent of the failed structure.
- Hand-tied knots are not permitted. Knotting line reduces its strength. Double locking snap hooks should always be used.
- The actual useful expectancy of ropes, lanyards, belts and harnesses cannot be simply stated. There are a number of factors, such as degradation by the sun, that may cause damage. Such damage may or may not be visible. If there is any question about the strength and reliability of the equipment, do not use it. Inspect the equipment every time before you put it in service.
- If a lifeline, lanyard or harness has been involved in a fall incident, it must be removed from service and discarded. The shock load imposed will have caused damage that may not be visible. This damage will have weakened the equipment. If put into service, it may not perform as expected if another fall were to occur.

Your life depends upon this equipment. Use it correctly.

