Have a Plan for Fall Rescue



What's at Stake?

You're in free fall after a misstep sent you over the edge of elevated work, 40-feet off the ground. Thoughts of your kids, spouse, and your dog Jake, rushing through your head. Who will take care of them? How will they cope with your death? Will you feel any pain when you hit the concrete below…or will the impact kill you before the pain? Ugh! That was close! You breathe a heavy sigh of relief as you realize your fall protection equipment just stopped you from hurtling to the ground and you escaped almost certain death. You look around, hoping your co-workers know what to do next, because you are now left hanging in the air hoping and waiting for someone to rescue you.

What's the Danger?

After a fall is arrested the work of getting the victim down begins. The rescue of any worker who has fallen and is being suspended in his/her safety harness must be done as quickly as possible because:

- The worker may have suffered injuries during the fall and may need medical attention.
- Left suspended in their safety harness for too long can lead to blood pooling in the lower body and can result in suspension trauma. This can happen in as little as 20-30 minutes.
- The suspended worker may panic if he or she is not rescued quickly.
- The event leading to the fall may create additional risks that must be addressed.

How to Protect Yourself

A rescue plan helps everyone understand what to do if a fall occurs; and the best time to have a plan for fall rescue is **BEFORE** a fall happens.

A rescue plan should consider who will be doing the rescue, where the rescue will take place, what kind of equipment is needed, and what the rescue options are for a work area. Obviously, this means that one rescue plan will not fit all situations and it will be necessary to look at each situation individually.

WHO

Self-rescue is an option in some cases but often rescue begins with on-site personnel such as co-workers or an in-house fire and rescue team. Emergency services are often called while on-site rescue begins. On-site rescuers can provide valuable information to emergency personnel that will save time and get help to the suspended worker faster.

WHERE

The where is as easy as considering the different places work at heights is performed and specific projects that are happening at any given time. In fact, each area where fall protection is required should have a rescue plan in place.

WHAT

The what is the type of equipment needed and the rescue options for an area or project. Rescue equipment can vary from using a ladder or an aerial lift, to using a team to cut the victim down and lower him or her to safety. This will depend on the type of fall protection device being used, if the victim is conscious, and where the fall occurred. For example, a self-retracting lifeline (SRL) positioned above the worker will mean they are still close to the fall site, whereas if a vertical line is attached to a horizontal safety line, the victim’s position could be quite far away from the original fall point. If the victim is unconscious it may be necessary to use retrieval and rope rescue.

Final Word

Don’t leave a worker hanging. Have a plan to perform a quick and safe rescue of workers suspended after a fall.