



# Fall Protection Toolbox Talk On

## Rescue: Emergency Fall Protection

*Over 100 years of  
reaching new heights*

If a fall leaves you suspended in a personal fall arrest system, you must know how to rescue yourself or someone else must know how to rescue you promptly. The pressure that results from hanging in a body harness can constrict blood flow between your lower extremities and your heart. If you cannot reduce the pressure promptly, you could lose consciousness within minutes. A prompt rescue can mean the difference between life and death.

What you can do to prevent emergencies: Identify the hazards that cause emergencies. Look for fall hazards in the tasks that workers do and the areas in which they work. Hazardous tasks include placing rebar, connecting steel beams, conducting exterior building maintenance, and working on roofs. Hazardous areas include holes in roofs and floors, hoist areas, unprotected roof edges, and slippery or unstable surfaces (including ladders and scaffolds).

**Eliminate or control the hazards:** After you identify fall hazards, you need to eliminate or control them so that they will not cause an emergency. You can eliminate many workplace fall hazards by placing rigid covers over holes, installing guardrails around unprotected roof edges, keeping walkways clean and slip-free, and making sure that workers use ladders and scaffolds that will support them and their equipment. Methods for controlling task related fall hazards include warning lines, safety nets, positioning devices, roof brackets with slide guards, and personal fall-arrest systems.

**How you can respond promptly if an emergency occurs:** Develop a written emergency response plan. This is the strategy for responding to fall-related emergencies. It does not need to be a massive document; however, it should show that you have thought about how to eliminate or control fall hazards and to ensure that workers will know how to respond promptly if something goes wrong. At a minimum, your plan should do the following:

- Establish emergency-response procedures.
- Establish a chain of command.
- Identify critical resources, including first responders, medical supplies, and rescue equipment
- Require emergency-response training for those affected by an emergency

**Establish a chain of command:** All employees should know their roles and responsibilities during an emergency; however, one person must be responsible for managing the emergency, i.e., assessing its scope, and directing the efforts of others.

- Make sure back-up personnel can take over for key players when they are absent.

**Identify critical resources:** Prompt rescues will not happen without trained first responders, medical supplies, and appropriate equipment. First responders include those who perform rescues and provide medical services. They must understand the procedures in your emergency plan, know how to administer first aid, and how to use rescue equipment.

- Every worksite needs medical supplies for likely injuries. Make sure they are appropriate for injuries that are likely to occur. Be sure to store the supplies in clearly-marked, protective containers and make them available to all shifts.
- Identify on-site equipment that responders can use to rescue a suspended worker (extension ladders and mobile lifts).

- Technical rescue equipment such as pulleys, winches, or brake tubes may be necessary at some sites.
- Always determine where and how each type of equipment would be effective in a rescue effort.
- Make sure the equipment will permit rescuers to reach a fall victim, that it is available when rescuers need it, and that rescuers know how to use it.
- Equipment that works during the summer, may not work during the winter. Seasonal and environmental conditions will affect rescue equipment.
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**Require emergency-response training:** An effective emergency-response plan ensures that on-site workers know emergency procedures, know how to use available rescue equipment, and if necessary know how to contact off-site responders. Workers who use personal fall arrest systems and who work alone must know how to rescue themselves. Those who work at a remote site may need a higher level of emergency training.

**When an emergency occurs:** If a suspended worker cannot perform a self-rescue, call the on-site emergency-response team and get the appropriate rescue equipment. First responders should clear a path to the victim. Others should direct emergency personnel to the scene.

- Prohibit all nonessential personnel from the rescue scene.
- Talk to the worker and try to determine the worker's condition.
- If the worker is accessible, provide comfort and check vital signs.
- If necessary, administer CPR (if trained to do so) and attempt to stop bleeding.
- If the worker's injuries are minor, proceed with the rescue. Only trained responders should attempt a technical rescue.
- If the worker has severe injuries, contact emergency medical responders. Remember, 911 responders may not be able to accomplish prompt rescues

**After any emergency:** Report fatalities and catastrophes to OSHA within eight hours. Always report all injuries requiring overnight hospitalization and medical treatment, other than first aid, to OSHA, within 24 hours. Document what went wrong, step by step.

- Identify all equipment that may have contributed to the emergency. Let a qualified person one who has the knowledge, the experience, and the demonstrated ability to resolve fall protection and rescue problems examine the equipment.
- If the equipment was damaged, repair or replace it. If the equipment contributed to the emergency, determine why and how.
- Determine what caused the emergency. Be as specific as possible. Include dates, times, environmental conditions, work processes, and persons involved.
- Review the emergency-response plan. Determine what procedures should be added or changed to prevent similar emergencies. Revise the plan accordingly.

This Toolbox Talk was developed for informational purposes only.