

Selecting, using and maintaining personal fall protection equipment

‘Height Aware’ campaign

Information sheet 4

If you are thinking about using personal fall protection equipment, this information will help you decide whether it is appropriate and, if so, how to use it safely.

What is personal fall protection equipment?

There are several types of personal fall protection systems and equipment. Users of these systems require high levels of training and appropriate close supervision:

- **work restraint** systems and equipment will include a lanyard which must be adjusted, or set, to a fixed length to prevent the user physically getting to a place where they could fall, eg a roof edge or fragile surface;
- **work positioning** systems and equipment enable the user to work in tension or suspension to prevent or limit a fall, eg a boatswain’s chair or linesman. A back-up system is needed in case the main support fails;
- **rope access** systems use two ropes, a working rope and a safety rope, each secured to a reliable anchor. The user’s harness is attached to both ropes in such a way they can get to and from the work area and the risk of falling is prevented or limited. This type of system could be used to access the side of a tall building where a cradle cannot be used;
- **fall arrest** systems and equipment limit the impact force of a fall on the user and prevent them hitting the ground. The anchor point should be as high as possible above the feet of the user to limit the distance of the fall. Equipment should be regularly inspected for wear and damage.

You should only consider the use of personal fall protection equipment to prevent or minimise the consequences of a fall when collective preventive measures, eg scaffolds and cherry pickers, are not practical. Personal fall protection equipment that prevents a fall, eg a work restraint system, should always take priority over personal equipment which only limits the height and/or consequences of a fall, eg a fall arrest system.



Selection

You should select equipment that:

- is suitable for the particular circumstances of the task, eg a restraint system should not be used for fall arrest;
- can be used for the particular task within its design limits, eg there is an adequate clearance distance when using fall arrest equipment;
- meets the standard relevant to its intended use, eg BS EN 361 for a full body harness;
- has compatible components so the safe function of any one component is not adversely affected by, and does not interfere with, that of another, eg do not use an energy-absorbing lanyard to extend an inertia reel, as this will affect the inertia reel’s performance.



Use

You will need to make sure that people using the equipment:

- are competent to check their equipment for defects and do this before every use;
- are suitably trained and assessed for competency in the use of their personal fall protection systems and equipment for the particular application;
- have read and understood the product information before using the equipment;
- have checked that the components in the system are compatible.

You will need to undertake checks and inspections:

- new equipment should be checked to make sure it is appropriate for the intended use, that it operates correctly and that it is in good condition;
- all equipment should be checked before each use;
- in addition to pre-use checks, equipment should have a detailed inspection by a competent person in accordance with a schedule drawn up by them;
- interim inspections should be made between the inspections by the competent person where a hazard that could cause significant deterioration in the equipment is present, eg use in acidic or alkaline environments or grit blasting etc;
- damaged equipment must be taken out of service immediately. Even a small cut in webbing can seriously affect performance.

You will also need to make sure:

- anchors and anchor points are of adequate strength;
- where possible, anchors and anchor points are above the user so that the anchor line or lanyard is taut or has as little slack as possible; and
- there is a rescue plan in place and suitable people and equipment available to put it into effect.

Maintenance

The user's life depends on their personal fall protection systems and equipment being maintained properly.

Equipment should be:

- kept clean and dry and properly stored;
- thoroughly dried before storage, if it has become wet;
- only altered or repaired when approved by the manufacturer.

Want to know more?

This is one of five 'Height Aware' campaign information sheets. The others in the series are:

Sheet 1: Work at height: The basics

Sheet 2: Selecting equipment for work at height

Sheet 3: Selecting competent contractors for work at height

Sheet 5: Minor roof maintenance work: Protecting against falls

More information is available on the HSE website www.hse.gov.uk/falls and from HSE Infoline on 0845 345 0055.