

Title:

Understanding Full Body Harnesses: Your Life Depends On It

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Summary:

Each year, on average, over 200 workers are killed and more than 100,000 are injured as a result of falls at construction sites.

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Article Body:

Workplace falls are the leading cause of fatalities in the U.S. construction industry. Each year, on average, over 200 workers are killed and more than 100,000 are injured as a result of falls at construction sites. Whether recreational or professional, whatever your particular reason for needing fall protection equipment, taking responsibility for understanding the need, proper usage and maintenance is critical. A few simple things will set you on your way:

How fall protection harnesses work: At the most basic level, everyone who will be using one should understand how a fall protection harness works. In the simplest of terms, a full-body harness or tower-climbing harness has straps that go around your torso and thighs and attaches with D-rings to the rest of the fall-arrest or restraint system. In the case of a fall, the full-body harness spreads the force over the thighs, chest, pelvis and shoulders. Other types of harnesses, or body belts should not be used as fall protection as they do not protect the body maximally from injury and can actually cause internal damage in the case of fall arrest.

Understand the need in your circumstance: Do you fully understand why a full-body harness is needed in your particular situation? In addition to the simple fact that strict government and workplace mandates might require their use, you should take the time to learn what the risks are for your particular situation. This will not only educate you so that you will make the best choice if you are to select your own harness, it will raise your awareness of potential dangers and enforce the consistent and proper usage.

Selecting a full-body harness: One problematic issue with full body harnesses

has been their comfort. And if they are not comfortable for the wearer, adjustments may be made that result in the harness not being worn properly and potentially jeopardizing their efficacy. Comfort can be improved with shoulder and back pads and other accessories to reduce body strain and pressure. There are also newer full-body harnesses such as the ExoFit family or the Delta II No Tangle Tower harnesses that were designed to address the comfort issues specifically.

After the fall: Planning for what should happen after a fall occurs is best undertaken before work begins. If your location is such that a rescue will be required, make preparations first. Suspension Trauma (also known as Orthostatic Intolerance or Orthostatic Shock) is a condition that can occur when a person remains suspended at height (after a fall) for even short periods of time. Suspension in a harness may cause blood to pool in the veins of the legs which can result in unconsciousness; if not rescued promptly, serious injury or death may occur. OSHA requires that employers provide for prompt rescue of employees in the event of a fall. Use a Suspension Trauma Safety Strap, which is designed to prevent suspension trauma while a worker is awaiting rescue.

Proper training on use, inspection and maintenance: In addition to any training provided by course leaders or employers, you should study and observe manufacturers' instructions. If the condition or location in which you will be using your harness changes, you should review them again. Inspect your equipment before each use and have your harness inspected professionally by the appropriate persons at least once a year. Pay particular attention to any cuts, tears, missing parts, unreadable markings, pulled stitches, abrasions, kinking or excessive oiliness. If equipment looks as if it has deteriorated in any way, be sure it is removed from use.

Although it seems obvious that in a circumstance where bodily injury or even fatality is a risk, that complete information is something that every full body-harness wearer would desire, it is not always the case that the information is sought after. There is comprehensive information and training easily available for Fall-Protection systems and procedures both online, and in person on-site trainings that can be arranged. Do your research beginning with the basic steps above and you will be taking ultimate responsibility for your safety. In cases where full-body harnesses are required, your life may indeed depend on it.