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Risk control

Working at Height Toolkit: Fall Restraint



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Introduction

The Work at Height¹ Regulations 2005 require that priority be given to equipment that provides collective protection as opposed to equipment that is 'personal' and protects only the person using it.

Work restraint is a method of fall protection that prevents the user from getting into a position where a fall from height could occur. It is a method of personal protection, so should be chosen only after consideration for collective methods of protection have been exhausted. Conversely, fall restraint systems should be chosen in preference to fall arrest systems.

Typically, work restraint systems involve the user wearing a safety harness, to which a fixed-length lanyard is attached, with the other end of the lanyard being attached to an immovable anchor point. The fixed-length nature of the lanyard makes it impossible for the wearer to enter a position in which a fall could occur.

Where an adjustable lanyard (or rope system) is used in fall restraint scenarios it is important that the lanyard is adjusted to the optimum length to prevent the user accessing a position where a fall could occur. When using a weight-based restraint system, consideration should be given to the number of personnel that might be using the system at any one time, how it will be raised to the roof and how the weight of the equipment will impact the loading capabilities of the surface on which it will be situated. Before using anchor points for a fall restraint system they must be assessed to ensure they are unquestionably secure for the loading imposed.

Work restraint systems are most commonly used for roof maintenance work to keep workers away from exposed edges, but they are also required by those working from boom type Mobile Elevating Work Platforms² (MEWPs), as they aim to keep personnel within the MEWP basket. Advice on fall protection for different types of MEWP is contained in 'Fall protection in mobile elevating work platforms' Technical Guidance Note³ H1 from the International Powered Access Federation (IPAF).

As with most other systems devised to offer personal protection they rely on users being competent and also on them maintaining a high level of discipline whilst undertaking the work, but also when getting to their point of work, or moving the anchor point, to enable them to start work in a new position.

Work Positioning

Work positioning systems, another form of personal protection, allow the user to work in a position of tension or

suspension, whilst the potential to fall is restricted by using specialist equipment. Systems of this nature also normally require the use of an independent fall arrest back up system. Work positioning systems⁴ are specialist in nature and are typically found in use by those carrying out works on antennae, masts or tree climbing / arboriculture⁵.

Whilst fall arrest and restraint harnesses typically contain a main point of attachment in the area between a user's shoulder blades, work positioning harnesses can contain as many as four attachment points so as to accommodate the different working positions the user may encounter. Work positioning harnesses must not be used for any other application, unless they are specifically designed for multi-purpose use.

Training

The level of training required will normally depend on the complexity of the task being undertaken, but in all instances those involved should have an awareness of:

- General safety when working at height
- Access and egress points
- The equipment they are using – how it should be used and its limitations
- Inspection requirements
- Emergency arrangements

In some instances training that is more specialist in nature is required, and it may be necessary to procure specialist technicians, i.e. those that are IRATA⁶ (Industrial Rope Access Trade Association) qualified, to undertake the work.

The European standard EN795:1996 relates to the design and testing of personal protection systems, BS7883:2007 provides guidance on the installation of EN795 systems and BS8437:2022 is a code of practice for their selection use and maintenance of personal fall protection systems and equipment for use in the workplace⁷. Walkways without guardrail are required to be designed to EN516.

References

1. Work at Height Regulations 2005. Available here: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/735/contents/made>
2. The selection, management and use of mobile elevating work platforms, GEIS6. Available here: [Health & Safety Executive](#)
3. Fall protection in mobile elevating work platforms Technical Guidance Note H1. Available here: <https://www.ipaf.org/en-gb>
4. Fall Arrest Safety Equipment Training. Available here: <https://www.faset.org.uk/>
5. Tree climbing. Available here: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/treework/safety-topics/climbing-operations>
6. BS 8610:2017 'Personal fall protection equipment. Anchor systems. Specification'. Available here: <https://knowledge.bsigroup.com/products/personal-fall-protection-equipment-anchor-systems-specification>
7. BS 8411:2019 'Safety nets on construction sites and other works' Code of Practice. Available here: <https://knowledge.bsigroup.com/products/safety-nets-on-construction-sites-and-other-works-code-of-practice>

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Further information

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