

Construction Safety Matters

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Inspecting and Caring for Your Fall Protection System

To maintain the service life and high performance of your workplace's fall protection system, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration suggests that you inspect its components regularly. You can do so by following the effective tips outlined below.

Inspecting Your Equipment

Webbing (body of belt, harness or lanyard)

- Inspect the entire surface of webbing for damage. Beginning at one end, bend the webbing in an inverted "U." Holding the body side of the belt toward you, grasp the belt with your hands 6 to 8 inches apart.
- Watch for frayed edges, broken fibers, pulled stitches, cuts or chemical damage. Broken webbing strands generally appear as tufts on the webbing surface.
- Replace according to manufacturer guidelines.

Buckle

- Inspect for loose, distorted or broken grommets. Do not cut or punch additional holes in the waist strap or strength members.
- If the belt does not have grommets, check for torn or elongated holes that could cause the buckle tongue to slip.
- Inspect the buckle for distortion and sharp edges. The outer and center bars must be straight. Carefully check corners and attachment points of the center bar. They should overlap the buckle frame and move freely back and forth in their sockets. The roller should turn freely on the frame.
- Check that rivets are tight and cannot be moved. The body side of the rivet base and outside rivet burr should be flat against the material. Make sure the rivets are not bent.
- Inspect for pitted or cracked rivets that show signs of chemical corrosion.

Rope Lanyard

- Rotate the rope lanyard and inspect from end to end for fuzzy, worn, broken or cut fibers. Weakened areas have noticeable changes in the original rope diameter.
- Not counting the initial break-in period, replace when the rope diameter is not uniform throughout.
- The older a rope is and the more use it gets, the more important testing and inspection become.

Harness Hardware (snaps or "D" rings)

- Inspect hardware for cracks or other defects. Replace the belt if the "D" ring is not at a 90° angle and does not move vertically independent of the body pad or "D" saddle.
- Inspect tool loops and belt sewing for broken or stretched loops.
- Check bag rings and knife snaps to see that they are secure and working properly. Check tool loop rivets. Check for thread separation or rotting, both inside and outside the body pad belt.
- Inspect snaps for hook and eye distortions, cracks, corrosion or pitted surfaces. The keeper (latch) should be seated into the snap nose without binding and should not be distorted or obstructed. The keeper spring should exert sufficient force to close the keeper firmly.

Safety Straps

- Inspect for cut fibers or damaged stitches inch by inch by flexing the strap in an inverted "U." Note cuts, frayed areas or corrosion damage.

- Check friction buckle for slippage and sharp buckle edges.
- Replace when tongue buckle holes are excessively worn or elongated.

Shock-Absorbing Packs

- Examine the outer portion of the shock-absorbing pack for burn holes and tears.
- Stitching on areas where the pack is sewn to the D-ring, belt or lanyard should be examined for loose strands, rips and deterioration.
- Remember, never use defective equipment. If there is any doubt about the safety of the equipment, do not use it. Replace any equipment involved in a fall, including ropes. Always report any questionable defects to your supervisor.

Cleaning and Maintaining Equipment

Basic care prolongs the life of your equipment and contributes to its performance.

- Wipe off all surface dirt with a sponge dampened in plain water. Rinse the sponge and squeeze it dry. Dip the sponge in a mild solution of water and commercial soap or detergent. Work up a thick lather with a vigorous back and forth motion.
- Rinse the webbing in clean water.
- Wipe the belt dry with a clean cloth. Hang freely to dry, away from direct heat, and out of long periods of sunlight.
- Store in a clean, dry area, free of fumes, sunlight or corrosive materials and in such a way that it does not warp or distort the belt.

For more safety tips, talk to your supervisor.

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