

PREVENTION OF FALLS

This alert has been generated to ensure that all workers in Victoria are aware of the risks associated with fall from height whilst working in the power industry. The *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (the OHS Act) places duties to ensure health and safety on various parties (called duty-holders) that apply to the prevention of falls at work

Under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007 (the Regulations), construction work is any work performed in connection with the construction, alteration, conversion, fitting out, commissioning, renovation, refurbishment, decommissioning or demolition of any building or structure, or any similar activity.

Employers must eliminate, so far as is reasonably practicable, any risk to health or safety associated with construction work. This includes risks to health or safety arising from fall hazards.

A SWMS with the following must be provided for the task if it fits into the category of high risk construction:

- identifies work that is high-risk construction work
- states the hazards and risks to health or safety of that work
- sufficiently describes measures to control those risks
- describes the manner in which the risk-control measures are to be implemented.

Describing the control measures and how they will be implemented includes providing, where applicable, a description of the equipment used in the work, the qualifications of the people doing the work and the training required to do the work safely. The statement is designed to be developed after or in conjunction with a risk assessment. The SWMS then be completed before all reasonable risk-control measures are put into place and before work begins.

There are considerable hazards in using a safety harness fall-arrest system. Their use



should only be considered where measures higher in the control hierarchy are not reasonably practicable.

A person must not use a safety harness fall-arrest system unless there is at least one other person on the site who has been trained and can rescue them if they fall. In some situations, at least two people are required to safely rescue a person who has fallen.

Safety harness systems can be used to arrest falls where workers are required to carry out their work near an unprotected edge. However, they can only be used as the primary means of risk control if it is not reasonably practicable to use measures higher in the control hierarchy. Safety harness fall arrest systems need to comply with the AS/NZS 1891 *Industrial fall-arrest systems and devices* series. Employers must ensure that any worker required to use a safety harness fall-arrest system is properly trained in its use.

Safety harness fall-arrest systems, incorporating a lanyard, need to be installed so that the maximum distance a person would free fall before the fall-arrest system takes effect is two metres. There needs to be sufficient distance between the work surface and any surface below to enable the system, including the action of any shock-absorber, to fully deploy. Personal energy absorbers complying with AS/NZS 1891.1 *Industrial fall-arrest systems and devices – Harnesses and ancillary equipment* need to be used in conjunction with the lanyard.

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Full body fall-arrest harnesses need to be worn. Waist-type belts should not be used as injuries can result when the wearer's fall is arrested. The harness connection point to the fall-arrest line needs to be made at the top dorsal position.

There needs to be a minimum of slack in the fall-arrest line between the user and the attachment. The anchorage point should be as high as the equipment permits. Never work above the anchor point, as this will increase the free fall distance in the event of a fall, resulting in higher forces on the body and greater likelihood of the arrest line snagging on obstructions.

Fall-arrest systems and safety harnesses should only be used with the individual manufacturer's components that are known to be compatible. The use of noncompatible components may lead to 'roll-out' with some hook/karabiner configurations, and could result in a user being injured or killed. The hazard cannot always be avoided by using components produced by the same manufacturer under the one brand name. If unsure whether components of a fall-arrest system are compatible, contact the manufacturer for further information.

Snap hooks need to be of the double action type, requiring at least two consecutive deliberate actions to open. Snap hooks should not be connected to each other as this could prevent the safe operation of the snap hook (eg roll-out may occur). Some double action hooks are susceptible to roll-out. Screw gate karabiners or hex nut connectors may sometimes be appropriate. For further guidance, see AS/NZS 1891.4 Industrial fall-arrest systems and devices – Selection, use and maintenance.

It is imperative that the rescue of a worker who is suspended in a full body harness occurs promptly. Suspension trauma is a condition where a person suspended in a harness in a substantially upright position may experience

blood pooling in the legs. Depending on the susceptibility of the individual, this may lead to loss of consciousness, renal failure and death. To enable workers to be removed from the suspended position as quickly as possible, employers need to consider having a pre-rigged retrieval system in place and ensure that workers using safety harnesses do not work alone. It is essential that all equipment is correctly maintained, with inspections and examinations of all components carried out by a competent person at regular intervals.

Employers need to ensure that a permanently fixed anchorage is inspected by a competent person, and it is regularly inspected at no less than six-month intervals if it is permanently fixed and in regular use. If a permanently fixed anchorage is not in regular use, it needs to be inspected before it is used. When the competent person doing an inspection assesses the anchorage is impaired, the employer needs to ensure that:

- the anchorage is not used and is tagged to indicate it is not to be used
- the repaired anchorage is not used until it is inspected by a competent person who can confirm it is safe to use.

All anchorages need to be visibly checked prior to use.

Checklists for inspections to detect any equipment faults and assess the condition of fall-arrest belts, lanyards and harnesses can be found in the equipment manufacturer's documentation.

A safety harness fall-arrest system that has arrested a fall needs to be checked by a competent person following the fall and not be used until it has been verified as being fully serviceable.

If any of the above cannot be verified the work **should cease**. Contact your designated Health & Safety Representative, your local organiser or alternatively your Union OH&S Officer.