



After a Fall

On any job site, the risk of falling from heights is real. Think about all the tasks that require working above ground. Ironworkers connect pieces of iron up in the air; form carpenters build columns on the edges of buildings; finishers trowel concrete after an elevated slab has been poured; sheet metal mechanics hang duct in shaft openings; and glazers install glass on the outside of buildings. All of these tradesmen and women are required to use fall protection equipment and to tie off to an approved anchorage point. It's all routine—until someone falls.

If you fall, you should be confident that your fall protection system is properly tied off and will work. If you did what you were trained to do, you'll find yourself alive, maybe a little bruised, and dangling in the air. But then what?

Anyone who falls and hangs suspended in a harness needs to be rescued as quickly as possible. The fall victim needs rescue support immediately because suspension trauma can set in quickly. When someone is hanging in a vertical position, blood begins to pool in the veins of the legs. This pooling can reduce blood flow to the brain and other organs. The result can be unconsciousness and death in as little as 30 minutes. Time is of the essence.

If you see a co-worker fall and end up suspended in the air, contact your supervisor and call 911 immediately to request rescue assistance from the fire department and medical assistance from the paramedics. Clear jobsite entrances to make room for rescue personnel. Talk to the victim calmly and be encouraging to help prevent shock.

If you've been trained and everybody knows what to do, the fall victim's chances of survival increase dramatically. Sometimes a rescue can be as simple as getting a ladder so the person who fell can climb down. Other rescues are much more complicated. Don't attempt a rescue if you haven't been trained; call 911 and let the professionals do their jobs. If you are involved in the rescue, and you're 6 feet or more above ground, be sure you wear fall protection.

If you have participated in a post-fall rescue and retrieval drill, you know that sometimes you can rescue yourself. If self-rescue isn't possible, be sure to use your relief step safety device. This device lets you stand in the foothold connected to the harness. By putting your foot into the foothold and "standing up", you will relieve some of the pressure between the harness and your thighs. This will help improve blood flow in your legs. Remember to pump your legs frequently to keep your muscles active, reduce blood pooling, and minimize the dangers of suspension trauma. Suspension trauma can be dangerous even after the rescue. If the person was hanging for more than a



couple of minutes, he or she should be checked out by paramedics and a doctor—even if he “feels fine” once he’s down.

SAFETY REMINDER

Make sure all of your PPE fits properly and you wear it correctly, so it protects you when you need it.