

The Work At Height Safety Association

Technical Guidance Note 5

“Guidance on rescue during work at height”

A series of informative notes for all industries
involved with work at height or rescue.

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WAHSA technical guidance note no. 5

Guidance on rescue during work at height

Introduction

This guidance note gives guidance on emergency planning and the provision of rescue resources for work at height, either for rescue of an incapacitated person by others, or self-evacuation of an individual without additional assistance. This guidance note offers general information about the issues which should be considered for emergency procedures for all work at height. It does not give information or detailed guidance on specific procedures or indicate whether individual methods might be preferable. Each site and situation will be different and formal and adequate training is required.

1.0 What's needs to be considered?

The emergency planning element is often not considered when work at height is being planned, and employers may wish to consider the following points:

- there is a lack of awareness of the effects of suspension in a harness and its consequences
- employers often fail to appreciate where and when rescue provision is required
- employers often fail to provide adequate rescue equipment or appreciate what is suitable equipment for use in rescue

Because rescue operations are carried out under extreme pressure, consideration should be given to all aspects of the rescue process, such as:

- the type of equipment required
- the demands placed upon the rescuer
- the training the rescuer will require to carry out the rescue
- how the effectiveness of the rescue system as a whole can be maintained

2.0 When are rescue plans required?

There are three main reasons why employers need to make provision for rescue arrangements when working at height:

1. the Work at Height Regulations 2005 (as amended) require it
2. the casualty needs to be attended to and recovered quickly
3. it is the employers responsibility and not some other individual or organisations

2.1 The Law

The Work at Height Regulations 2005 require employers to make specific provisions for emergency planning.

“Organisation and planning – 4. (1) Every employer shall ensure that work at height is (a) properly planned... (2) ...planning of work includes planning for emergencies and rescue” (Work at Height Regulations, 2005 Regulation 4).

In addition, the regulation requires that all activities, including rescue, must be carried out by competent persons.

“Competence – Every employer shall ensure that no person engages in any activity, including organisation, planning and supervision, in relation to work at height...unless he is competent to do so...” (Work at height Regulations, 2005 Regulation 5).

2.2 The need for a rapid response

If a person suspended is injured, their condition may be affected by the speed of recovery and the level of care subsequently provided, so help must be available promptly. If the person suspended is not injured a rapid response is required as being suspended for any length of time after a fall may result in physiological complications. Pre existing medical conditions may be exacerbated.

In cases where evacuation is required, it may be essential that the operation is completed rapidly for reasons of objective danger, e.g. fire.

3.0 Safety Issues and Considerations

It is essential that there is a specific rescue plan and adequate resources in place for each worksite where work at height is carried out. These should be regularly assessed and updated where necessary. Resources should include not only equipment but also personnel who have been trained in the use of that equipment.

When planning for rescue, consideration should be given to situations from which the casualty may be recovered and the type of fall protection equipment which the casualty would be using.

A distinction may be made between the terms "rescue" and "evacuation". Rescue typically involves the recovery of a casualty by another person either remotely or directly. Evacuation is typically carried out by a stranded user to escape from a remote situation such as a tower crane or narrow aisle truck.

Listed below are examples of different situations or fall protection systems from which a casualty may need to be recovered and for which suitable provision should be made.

- fall arrest block – steel wire
- fall arrest block - textile
- vertical anchor line – wire
- vertical anchor line – textile
- vertical rail
- horizontal anchor line – wire
- horizontal anchor line – textile
- energy absorbing lanyard
- hooped ladder

Some situations may create special difficulties, for example attaching to a remote casualty who is suspended out of reach and consideration of this needs to be made.

All rescue planning and operations should address the following issues:

- the safety of the persons carrying out or assisting with the rescue
- the anchor points to be used for the rescue equipment must be adequate
- the suitability of equipment (anchors, harnesses, attachments and connectors) that has already arrested the fall of the casualty for use during the rescue
- the method that will be used to attach the casualty to the rescue system
- the direction that the casualty needs to be moved to get them to the point of safety (raising, lowering or lateral)
- the first aid needs the casualty may have with respect to injury or the effects of suspension and who will carry this out
- the possible needs of the casualty following the rescue

The anticipated loads during the rescue situation should be within the loadings specified in the manufacturer's user instructions. If the loads placed on some items of equipment during a potential rescue may be higher than they have been originally designed for, whether individually or as part of a system, the supplier should verify that it has suitable performance and loading characteristics in that specific configuration. This applies to all parts of the system including the anchors.

Remember that if a rescue procedure requires an operator to descend to recover a casualty there may be additional loading on all parts of the system including the anchor, which may be required to support the load of two persons. Anchor points are an important part of any rescue system and should be suitably positioned for the intended operation and should be unquestionably sound.

Some special types of anchor device (e.g. portable horizontal lines and portable deadweights) may not be suitable for such applications. In particular, deadweights are unlikely to be capable of supporting the weight of two persons. Users of such systems should consult the manufacturer for guidance.

When completing a rescue, methods which minimise the risk to rescuers are preferred. Always avoid placing additional personnel at risk.

4.0 Carrying out a rescue

4.1 Types of rescue

There are four options for dealing with an emergency which requires an injured or incapacitated person to be recovered to safety. Remembering that the immediate aim is to recover the casualty to the nearest point of safety, the following hierarchy of rescue methods applies:

1. lowering a remote casualty
2. raising a remote casualty
3. self-evacuation by descent
4. rescuing another in descent

In all cases it is preferable that the rescuer is not involved in descent or suspension. Option 1 is generally preferable to option 2 because it is more straightforward and physically easier to lower a load than raise one.

4.2 Technical considerations

The potential for a casualty to be located over an edge should be considered. Any rescue will be further complicated where edges and obstructions are involved, as it will:

- increase the effective load in raising operations due to additional friction
- create risks of cutting or abrasion of the anchor line
- interfere with the operation of rescue equipment

The above should be considered when selecting equipment to ensure that it will still operate effectively in the conditions required.

In most situations, whether the casualty is to be raised or lowered, the system is prone to damage from abrasion and cutting as it will be under tension. A suitable risk assessment may indicate the need to use rescue equipment that is capable of coping with these conditions or an additional safety line may be required as a backup.

When operating rescue equipment it is essential that control is maintained at all times. Always refer to the manufacturer's user instructions.

The anchor for the rescue equipment should be in a position where the equipment can be operated easily and safely. It may be preferable to site the equipment away from the edge to be able to operate it in safety, which may require the use of additional equipment to redirect or align the system correctly. If possible, arrange the anchor point so that the equipment does not contact the edge, as they can cause problems including abrasion of the system, increased friction and a potential for shock loading if the edge collapses. If this cannot be achieved (e.g. on top of a building) then the equipment must be protected from the edge and care taken to ensure that the edge is capable of sustaining the loads applied.

Always maintain a steady, controlled rate of movement at all times when raising or lowering a casualty and ensure that they do not come into contact with obstructions. Some items of rescue equipment (e.g. certain winches and descent devices) allow movement in only one direction, so it is important not to lift or lower the casualty into a position where they become stranded. A guy

line or a tag line may be attached to the casualty to pull them away from any obstructions and direct them toward the desired location.

The person being rescued may be conscious or unconscious and the rescue plan must allow for this. It is important that during the rescue the casualty is not moved into a potentially dangerous situation. Ideally the rescuer will be able to at all times, communicate with the casualty, see the casualty or be able to communicate with someone who can see the casualty.

4.3 General procedure for casualty recovery

1. assess the situation fully before commencing a rescue operation
2. request medical assistance
3. identify proper position from which to carry out the operation
4. identify proper anchorage points
5. identify a point of safety to move the casualty to
6. make sure all involved are aware of the procedure and their role within it
7. ensure personnel have been trained in rescue procedures and are competent to carry out their role
8. carry out rescue steadily and in a controlled manner
9. make sure communication is maintained at all times
10. monitor the casualty's condition at all times and where possible provide the necessary first aid
11. conduct a review of the whole situation identifying areas of improvement for the future

4.4 Medical implications of suspension

All users of personal fall protection systems and others involved with work at height should be aware of the following precautions that might need to be taken in the event of a casualty being in a suspended position.

1. the longer the casualty is suspended without moving, the greater the chances are of serious consequences developing. Therefore, an injured person hanging in a harness awaiting rescue should be removed from upright suspension as quickly as possible. The aim should be to do this within 10 minutes. This is particularly important for a casualty who is a motionless
2. A conscious casualty should be encouraged to exercise their legs gently, to stimulate circulation of blood

Note: manufacturers provide various types of equipment to reduce the effects of harness suspension for a fallen person. These items are only effective if the casualty is still able to employ them. They are not a substitute to rescue provision.

3. Regarding position of the casualty:
 - during rescue, a position with the lower limbs slightly elevated may be preferable
 - if prolonged suspension has occurred, or if in doubt, alert medical agencies immediately

Following an accident, the casualty should be:

- removed from the suspended position to the nearest point of safety
- assessed by a qualified first aider
- given professional medical assistance as quickly as possible

Users of personal fall protection equipment should be aware of potential complications which can occur from prolonged suspension. Staff will require training in rescue techniques or alternatively it may be necessary to create a specially trained rescue team on site to be available at short notice.

4.5 Rescue equipment

Specific rescue equipment should always be present at the worksite. This equipment should be sufficient to carry out a rescue of an individual from any situation on the site. Rescue systems may be designed specifically for rescue or for evacuation and may allow only lowering, only raising or both.

There is some confusion about the applicability of product standards for rescue equipment or equipment that is used for rescue. This confusion is compounded by a lack of available guidance for users on how to select and identify suitable rescue systems. Purchasers should be aware of the difference between testing which has been carried out for the purposes of type approval and additional tests which can demonstrate the suitability of a product or system for other purposes.

When selecting items of equipment for use in rescue situations you need to satisfy yourself that the item is suitable for your specific application or applications. Rescue equipment may be tested in two different ways; as a whole, or as individual components. In both cases the rescue equipment should conform to appropriate European or British standards. Examples of standards that relate to rescue equipment and some of the common applications are as follows:

- BS EN 341: 2011 – Personal fall protection equipment.
Descender devices for rescue. Used for self-evacuation, rescue of another person by descent or for lowering a casualty. These devices may be used in conjunction with the following items to create systems which may also raise a casualty
 - BS EN 567: 2013 – Mountaineering equipment. Rope clamps. Safety requirements and test methods
 - BS EN 795: 2013 – Personal fall protection equipment. Anchor devices.
 - BS EN 12278: 2007 – Mountaineering equipment. Pulleys. Safety requirements and test methods
 - BS EN 1891: 1998 – Personal protective equipment for the prevention of falls from a height. Low stretch kernmantel ropes
Used in conjunction with descent devices for assembling pulley systems for raising and lowering. Commonly used for rescue in pre-assembled kits and as components in rescue systems which are assembled at the scene by specially trained persons
- BS EN 1496: 2006 – Personal fall protection equipment. Rescue lifting devices.
Pre-assembled devices for raising and lowering – commonly used for rescue in confined space situations.
- BS EN 360: 2002 – Personal protective equipment against falls from a height.
Retractable type fall arresters.

European and British standards set out performance specifications for products but they may not cover all aspects of the intended use of the equipment. If products are intended to be used in a way which is clearly outside the use specified in the standard, it may be appropriate to carry out additional testing to ensure that the equipment is fit for the intended purpose.

In the case of rescue equipment sold for specific applications this additional testing should have been carried out by the manufacturer or supplier. e.g. a pre-assembled rescue kit. Alternatively if a rescuer utilises a piece of equipment for other than its intended purpose or creates a system from components, then the rescuer must be sure that the equipment is fit for purpose. This may require the rescuer to conduct additional testing or carry out research prior to implementing the system. This will confirm that the equipment will perform safely and in the manner required.

Harnesses used for rescue can be split into two categories. Those designed for rescue specifically and those designed for fall protection that can be utilised during a rescue. If a casualty is suspended by a fall protection harness then rescuing them utilising it is unlikely to increase the risk to them.

Harnesses designed specifically for rescue may offer benefits such as quick and easy fitting to a casualty (ideal where the casualty is unconscious, requires securing quickly or needs to be evacuated from a situation without delay) or the orientation that they suspend the casualty (this is essential when raising a casualty through a confined access point).

If a casualty is badly injured, the use of a stretcher may need to be considered.

4.6 First Aid

The Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981 state “an employer shall provide, or ensure that there are provided, such equipment and facilities as are adequate and appropriate in the

circumstances for enabling first-aid to be rendered to his employees if they are injured or become ill at work” (The Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations, 1981 Regulation 3). To meet this regulation, a risk assessment must be carried out by the employer at every work site, and to do this the employer must consider the following:

- the location of the workplace
- the type of risks involved
- the remoteness of the site from emergency services
- the needs of remote works
- employers working on shared or multi-occupied site

There should be a suitable first aid kit present at every worksite together with a person who has specific responsibilities for administering first aid.

The knowledge requirements for first aiders where training is being done for work at height are given in BS 8454: 2004 and can be summarised as follows:

- the role of the first aider, the use of available equipment and recording of incidents
- basic hygiene
- assessment of the situation to enable effective action
- casualty assessment and handling
- administration of first aid safely, promptly and effectively to casualties who may be:
 - unconscious and / or in seizure
 - wounded or bleeding and / or in shock
 - choking
 - sustained a fracture
 - sustained a spinal injury
 - suffering from the effects of suspension in a harness
- administration of cardiopulmonary resuscitation promptly and effectively
- effective use of a neck collar

WAHSA recommend that first aiders for all work at height are able to satisfy these requirements

5.0 Inspections and Checks

Rescue or evacuation equipment should be inspected as per other equipment for work at height (see WAHSA Technical Guidance note number 3) although the period specified between inspections might be longer than for normal work equipment if the rescue or evacuation equipment has not been used and has been stored correctly.

This equipment should in any case be inspected at least once a year and always after use for a rescue or evacuation, by a competent person. For additional guidance refer to the manufacturer or supplier.

Rescues are unplanned events that require an immediate and effective response. Correct maintenance of rescue equipment will ensure that it is ready for use and when deployed it will function correctly. Any part of a rescue system that does not function correctly when needed will unnecessarily increase the risk to the casualty and possibly the rescuer.

6.0 Training

WAHSA strongly recommend that all users of fall protection equipment are trained by a competent organisation. Training should include information on the selection of the correct products for the intended work situation and pre-use checks for specific equipment.

Carrying out rescues and the use of rescue equipment requires technical capability in addition to the ability to use personal fall protection. The requirement for training and the opportunity to maintain competence by either repeat training or rescue practices is essential and should not be underestimated.

7.0 References

WAHSA Technical Guidance Notes (available from www.wahsa.org.uk)

The Work at Height Regulations 2005

The Lifting Equipment and Lifting Operations Regulations 1998

BS EN 354: 2010. *Personal fall protection equipment. Lanyards*

BS EN 355: 2002. *Personal protective equipment against falls from a height. Energy absorbers*

BS EN 358: 2000. *Personal protective equipment for work positioning and prevention of falls from a height. Belts for work positioning and restraint and work positioning lanyards*

BS EN 361: 2002. *Personal protective equipment against falls from a height. Full body harnesses*

BS EN 362: 2009. *Personal protective equipment against falls from a height. Connectors*

BS EN 363: 2008. *Personal fall protection. Personal fall protection systems*

BS EN 364: 1993. *Personal protective equipment against falls from a height. Test methods*

BS EN 365: 2004. *Personal protective equipment against falls from a height. General requirements for instructions for use, maintenance, periodic examination, repair marking and packaging*

BS EN 1496: 2006. *Personal fall protection equipment. Rescue lifting devices*

BS 7883: 2005. *Code of practice for the design, selection, installation, use and maintenance of anchor devices conforming to BS EN 795*

BS 8437: 2005 + A1: 2012. *Code of practice for selection, use and maintenance of personal fall protection systems and equipment for use in the workplace*

BS 8454: 2006. *Code of practice for the delivery of training and education for work at height and rescue*

