

Tear this out
and share with
your crew

Up in the air

Sacrificing safety for convenience could cost you

The accident: A worker was replacing structural steel members on a 280-foot-tall communications tower. Suspended 60 feet in the air, he was preparing to lower himself into position using a controlled descent system. According to a fellow crew member, the worker suddenly dropped to the ground. Rescue workers responded; however, the worker was pronounced dead at the scene.

The bottom line: A post-accident investigation determined the worker was using only a controlled descent device that also functioned as a lifeline and had no separate fall arrest system in place. The line was attached to the tower via an anchor strap attached to a horizontal member. The worker also had a harness strap connected to the anchor strap. Instead of unhooking his controlled descent line when ready to lower himself into position, the worker accidentally unhooked his harness strap. When he sat into position to descend, the weight pulled his lifeline from the anchor strap, causing him to fall backwards to the ground.

The tools you use: The workers said the controlled descent device was used alone because it was easier to master than the OSHA-recommended rope grab or rope brake.

The victim's fellow crew



Illustration by Don Lomax

members said they didn't like using the rope grab for several reasons. Not only was it harder to learn to use, when the wind blew, sometimes it would hit them in the head. Had a backup system been in place, however, the worker could not have fallen more than 6 feet before the fall arrest system would have engaged. While you can use a controlled descent device when working at heights, you must also have an approved fall arrest system that enables the automatic repositioning of the connection to the separate fall protection system. You're required to be attached to a separate lifeline when using a vertical lifeline.

Also, anyone who is on a job where he or she will be exposed to

fall hazards is required to complete training that includes hazard recognition, proper procedures and proper hook-up, anchoring and tie-off techniques prior to beginning work. Ask to see the project's safety and health plan, which will be based on a job hazard analysis conducted by a competent person. The plan will enable you to be aware of and prepare for the hazards of each specific task you're assigned to complete.

[Editors note: New OSHA rules stipulate that for residential roofs sloped 4 on 12 or greater, contractors must use "acceptable" fall protection equipment such as guardrails, safety nets or fall arrests systems with body harnesses and deceleration devices. Failure to comply could lead to fines as great as \$7,000 per worker.]

EW0113

Information for this Safety Watch came from an accident report, OSHA 29 CFR 1926.502(d)10i, ANSV/ASSE Z359.1-2007 and the

Center for Disease Control's NIOSH Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation Program. It is designed for general information only.

Date of safety talk: _____ Leader: _____
Attending: _____

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