

TOOLBOX TALK #43

FOUR FALL PROTECTION OPTIONS FOR MEWPS

An educational document from a group of industry associations outlines four options for a personal fall restraint system or personal fall arrest system. When considering these options, a critical point is that when the options are used in fall arrest configuration, a rescue plan must be in place, as well as an assurance that free fall will not exceed six feet.



- Fall restraint using a short lanyard: The location of the anchor point and the height of the worker are critical in the determination of lanyard length and the overall ability of the system to prevent a fall.
- Fall restraint or arrest using a lanyard with an adjuster: This option allows the worker to have either a fall restraint system or a fall arrest, depending on the adjusted length of the lanyard. One challenge to this option is whether the worker is permitted to manually adjust the lanyard to keep it as short as possible. The work preplanning assessment should include examination of what might prompt workers not to make required lanyard adjustments so that risk reduction countermeasures can be designed and applied to achieve desired performance outcomes.
- Fall restraint or fall arrest using a double-legged lanyard: A double-legged lanyard is equipped with a restraint (short) and an arrest (long) lanyard with an energy absorber. The length of the restraint lanyard is determined by the length required to reduce the possibility of the worker falling out of the MEWP. The longer leg of the double-legged lanyard is used after the MEWP is transported to the work location and additional mobility is needed. One challenge to consider is whether the operator is trained to understand the proper procedure for using the equipment correctly in each situation. Some organizations may conclude that changing between short and long lanyards could lead to greater risks.
- Fall restraint or arrest using a self-retracting lanyard (SRL): The SRL selected must be one that the manufacturer approves for use with the specific MEWP equipment. Some SRLs are not designed to have the anchor point below the connection point on the worker. Also, the SRL should only be used if the personal fall protection equipment manufacturer has tested it to protect the worker from the ejection hazard. It is common for MEWP anchorages to be below worker waist height, which may render the SRL ineffective. Before use, this issue should always be verified with the personal fall protection equipment manufacturer.

The commonly used 6-ft energy-absorbing lanyard is not included in this list, as it is not part of the document referenced. While its use is compliant in some situations, the preceding four options are much safer and their use should be prioritized when preparing fall protection use and rescue procedures. The primary situations where a single leg, 6-ft energy-absorbing lanyard has unacceptable risk include where fall clearances are insufficient, the anchorage is not rated for fall arrest and there is no rescue plan.