

TOOLBOX TALK #19

LADDER QUESTIONS – PART 2

(See Toolbox Talk #18 for Part 1 of this conversation on “Ladder Questions”.)

What are the Employer’s requirements and responsibilities when placing workers at height?

In addition to compliance with hazard-specific standards, all employers have the duty to provide a work environment “free from recognized hazards that are causing or likely to cause death or serious physical harm”. We’ve typically blamed the worker for a fall, for making a mistake, but in most cases, we provide workers with a poor tool and expect them to make the most of it. In the past 15 to 20 years, however, we’ve started focusing on the tools and equipment that make it safer for the workers vs. workers having to make the decision to be safe. The job of the general contractor is to find ways to work faster and easier which, by default, will often be safer.



What are a user’s/employer’s responsibilities when selecting the right equipment for the task?

The employer’s responsibilities reside in the adequate choice of the most suitable system to use, making sure that the workers are adequately trained and supervised and that written rescue procedures are in place. There is legislation around the standards that some of the equipment has to meet but typically, there should be a risk assessment of the job being done. OSHA would say “ladders last”. There are best practices, different ways to mitigate risks, and if you can’t eliminate the risk, try to reduce its severity to the worker. Near miss reporting is also important. Employers should be recording times when things nearly happened, recognizing what the hazards were and eliminating the risks before something does happen. The worker’s responsibilities are to follow the instructions provided by the employer and the training with respect to inspection, maintenance and use of the system.

What other options to contractors have to place their workers at temporary work at height?

The vast majority of ladder applications are in 4 to 20 foot working heights. Most jobs typically require getting a device that will go through a standard doorway, won’t damage flooring, and can go in and out of personnel elevators. There are a variety of powered and non-powered platforms that all have these things in common. They eliminate the risk of not being able to hold on while moving material up and down the ladder, the risk of missing that bottom step or working at the top of a set of steps. Many are finding an increase in productivity when ladders are not used to gain height.