

## TOOLBOX TALK #34

### FALL PROTECTION HARNESS MAINTENANCE

Fall protection harnesses are an essential piece of safety equipment on jobsites where workers perform tasks at height, necessitated by both OSHA regulations and industry best practices. As with any piece of equipment, harnesses require care, maintenance and storage to ensure they function properly. In the case of a harness, any malfunction could have severe consequences. Users who want a harness to perform at the highest level first should select equipment that is manufactured to exacting standards. The person managing the purchase of the product should do sufficient research, seeking out equipment that has a strong track record of safety and is manufactured by a brand that he or she trusts. Touching the harness and testing it in person also will help with the decision – great workmanship is typically more noticeable (and tougher to fake) in the real world.



Once a harness has been selected, the user should ensure that it is properly stored by keeping it free of moisture, protected from impact and away from extreme temperatures. It is recommended that harnesses be stored either hanging, flat or neatly folded to prevent unnecessary stress or wear. Harnesses also should be inspected regularly and cleaned as part of a normal equipment maintenance program. Some harnesses are available with built-in safeguards that provide easy inspection or have visual cues to alert when they might not be safe to use. This can be particularly important at large jobsites where personal protective equipment is provided to end users at the beginning of each shift. The worker should be able to quickly and easily assess whether his or her fall protection equipment will function as desired.

To aid in this process, some harnesses have visual technology built into the straps, providing an obvious color change that indicates a point on the harness may be worn out. Some harnesses also have impact indicators at key fastening points to show whether the harness has been involved in a fall by displaying a warning that is visible only after impact. After inspecting a harness and ensuring all visual indicators are in good working order, the user should take care to clean the harness as best as he or she can. Any dirt, grease or building material residue on the harness should be wiped away, and harnesses should never be dropped directly on the ground or on dirt. Dirt particles can work their way into the harness straps and potentially compromise their strength over time.

Should a fall protection harness get dirty, the wearer will need to clean it immediately according to the manufacturer's instructions. If those instructions are not available, most harnesses can be cleaned with a damp sponge and warm, soapy water. After washing with soap, a typical harness should be rinsed thoroughly and hung to dry, although preferably not in direct sunlight. With conscientious storage, regular care and a little maintenance, a well-made harness will perform at its highest level for many years. Of course, the same rules apply to much of the equipment found at jobsites all over the country, but in the case of personal fall protection, these simple steps can also be lifesaving measures.