OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: Fall Protection Systems - Anchor Points for Fall Arrest Systems

[Reference 1910 Subpart D / 1926 Subpart M]

Selecting the wrong anchor point could have some painful, or even deadly, ramifications. That means you must put some serious thought into what you clip on to with your lanyard. Let's discuss some **general principles about anchor points for fall arrest systems.**

First of all, be aware that when you free-fall and then hit the end of the lanyard, the shock load created can significantly exceed the total combined weight of your body plus any clothing and tools you may be holding; up to 10 times your total combined weight. So, only attach to an anchor point that a qualified person has determined will support two times the maximum shock load applied when someone of your total weight falls. And never tie off to objects such as, but not limited to, guardrails, scaffold posts, ladder rungs or side rails, window mullions, roof vent pipes, electrical conduit, ductwork, gas or sprinkler pipes, or ceiling tile grids, as these items are never suitable (or rated) anchor points for a personal fall arrest system.

Secondly, when presented with two or more suitable anchor points, the higher the anchor point is likely preferred. That is because OSHA fall protection standards require us to limit our free fall to no more than six feet, and attaching to the higher anchor point will lessen the distance you will free fall. This is beneficial because you will generate less of a jolt when you reach the end of the lanyard. Of course, you should also select the shortest lanyard possible when performing your job to reduce your fall distance. In cases where attaching the lanyard to a high enough anchor point to limit your free fall to six feet or less is not feasible, ask the Competent person to look at alternatives, such as using a retractable lanyard or a travel restraint device.

Another good thing to keep in mind is to select a suitable anchor point that is located as close to the center of your body as possible; ideally, directly over your head. Doing so lessens the propensity of your body to swing sideways causing you to strike a nearby object. Many anchor points are designed for only one person and would therefore not be suitable for two or more people to use simultaneously. So make certain of the rated capacity of an anchor.

Lastly, remember that manufactured portable anchors, which are used on many jobs, must be attached to approved supporting structural members using the manufacturer's specified fasteners and installation instructions. Do not take shortcuts when installing these devices, or they could fail.

Does anyone have any other safety tips or questions regarding anchor points that you would like to discuss today?