



## EQUIPMENT INSPECTION: Control Quality & Cost in the Workplace



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**FALL PROTECTION EQUIPMENT** wears during use and must be inspected. Many accidents and fatalities have occurred because equipment was not inspected. In fact, most accidents involving fall protection equipment failure can be attributed to misuse or inadequate inspections. A complete, managed fall protection program includes an effective process for tracking and inspecting all fall protection equipment.

A managed inspection program serves two basic purposes: First, it promotes quality control by creating an invaluable inspection history to help inspectors evaluate the condition of equipment. Second, it keeps track of costs and assets.

Many inspectors focus on individual parts and their components but don't bother to record findings and log results. During the next inspection, there's no documented history associated with the item. Many items are discarded prematurely, regardless of their condition, because inspectors cannot gather enough information to evaluate them.

An inspection program also helps companies manage their assets. Many companies purchase protective equipment costing tens of thousands of dollars. Good business practices dictate that costs should be tracked and analyzed to determine equipment life expectancy by person or department. This tracking information enables purchasers to prepare accurate budgets, predict equipment life and manage purchases.

With a few exceptions, most fall protection equipment has a standard breaking strength of 5,000 lbs. (22.2 kN). With normal use, such equipment should only be exposed to between 900 and 1,800 lbs. (4 to 8 kN) of force. The higher rating allows an appropriate margin of safety for both excessive loads as well as equipment deterioration.

When equipment has been removed from its shipping bag, its integrity becomes questionable. Many environmental conditions cannot be quantified to predict the degree to which equipment will degrade over time.

Ultraviolet (UV) light exposure is a good example. Manufacturers recommend that equipment exposed to excessive UV light should be removed from service, but they are not specific about light intensity or duration of exposure. They also say that soft goods should be retired once they are excessively soiled, but they do not define "excessively."

Many inspection guidelines are ambiguous and vague. Consequently, the decision to keep or destroy equipment is often a judgment call for inspectors. The more information an inspector has about a piece of equipment, the easier this decision becomes.