



Window cleaning incident – Falling person

An accident occurred during a window cleaning job, where ropes required moving from one drop to the next as soon as it was finished with. One operative had descended to the ground; another operative had descended a second set of ropes, which landed on a flat roof. At this point rather than gathering his ropes and feeding them off the flat roof down to ground level, he opted to disconnect from them and re-attach to an adjacent set (which he had not been cleared to use), which reached ground level.

He fell 3.5metres to the ground sustaining wrist injury, because the ropes were detached from their anchors and being held by the supervisor during the process of re-rigging to the next anchor set.

Conclusion: A potentially fatal incident, largely due to the failure of the operative to follow laid down procedure, as communicated by the supervisor, as to when ropes would be safe to use.

Incident analysis/ control measures / lessons to be learned

- 1 Work to agreed procedures which include: Pre work briefing [Tool box talk] covering, but not limited to:
- 2 Rope access technicians should not ascend or descend any anchor lines without confirmation from the supervisor that it is safe to do so, following pre-descent/pre-ascent checks.
- 3 Before any anchor lines are de-rigged, it is essential that all members of the team confirm that they are safe and aware that de-rigging is about to take place.
- 4 Adequate communications are necessary for safety e.g. radios, mobile phone etc
- 5 If the supervisor is supervising operatives from another company, there should be clarification and prior agreement of the work procedures.
- 6 **Not relevant in this case**, but could be in a situation with long ropes above a short drop to the ground. Getting off mid-descent, and getting on again, or getting on to new anchor lines at mid height presents a problem. Previously unloaded ropes will stretch suddenly, possibly allowing a technician to drop a distance proportional to the length of rope above. In order to be safe there should be suitable anchors at mid-height for the technician to attach to, while the rope above is tensioned to remove slack.