

Why Tie?

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Proper fall protection isn't an option, it's a necessity!

Fifteen years ago, if you asked most people involved in the steel erection industry about "tying off," they would have replied that it couldn't be done. They might cite reasons like hazards associated with cranes and loads coming into connectors, the loss of productivity, or possible loss of market share to concrete. Since that time, most, if not all steel erectors have made the mandatory switch from safety belts to full-body safety harnesses.

In 1996, a group of erectors in Colorado began using a post system that attached to the top flange of beams. The erectors incorporated a horizontal lifeline system and a mandatory requirement for fall protection at heights above 15'. At the time, a lot of people thought those erectors would be out of business-but now, less than 10 years later, those same erectors are still going strong. They have reaped huge savings in the cost of insurance and enjoyed benefits such as a reduction in the number of OSHA inspections and citations, less employee turnover due to injuries, and lower incident rates.

Now, more technology is providing additional methods to help prevent ironworkers from falling. Items such as "Beamers" that attach by clamping on beam or column flanges and a wide variety of retractable lifeline and horizontal lifeline systems also provide effective fall-protection anchorage points for ironworkers. New fabrics have made harnesses lighter and more comfortable, and can be customized and equipped with features such as tool belts, back pads and other items.

Still, more needs to be done to change the mindset of the "old school" veterans so that fall protection is planned, provided and used automatically. After all, falls are still the number one killer of ironworkers and other construction craft workers.

Effective training for all ironworkers as required by OSHA under the new Steel Erection Subpart R standards, the willingness of management to plan and provide the right fall-protection equipment for the job, and strong disciplinary action when the equipment is not used, or used incorrectly, are all needed to establish an effective fall-protection program. ★