SKILLSIGNAL™
Construction Safety & Compliance

TOOLBOX TALK

Full Body Harness Fit: Wearing It Is Not the Same as Wearing It Right

TOPIC NO.	DURATION	AUDIENCE
FP-07	**10 to 15 min**	**All Crew**

OSHA REFERENCE 29 CFR 1926.502(d) · 29 CFR 1926.503 · ANSI/ASSP Z359.11

PROJECT / JOBSITE	DATE	PRESENTED BY

01 THE HOOK

START HERE

Plenty of the workers who died in falls last year had a harness on. Read that again. The harness was on their body. It was too loose, the chest strap was down at their stomach, a leg strap was unbuckled from lunch, or the D-ring had slid off to one side. When they hit the end of the lanyard, the harness did what a bad-fitting harness does: it let them slide out, or it broke their back, or it crushed their throat. Putting a harness on is the easy part. This talk is about the thirty seconds of adjustment that decide whether it works.

02 WHAT THE HARNESS HAS TO DO

When you fall and the lanyard catches, the harness has to spread a force of up to **1,800 pounds** (the maximum arresting force OSHA allows under **29 CFR 1926.502(d)(16)(ii)**) across your thighs, pelvis, chest, and shoulders, and hold you upright until rescue. It can only do that if every strap is where the engineer put it. Body belts have been **banned** from fall arrest since January 1, 1998. A badly fitted harness is a body belt with extra straps.

MAXIMUM ARRESTING FORCE

1,800

POUNDS

29 CFR 1926.502(d)(16)(ii)

THAT FORCE GOES WHERE THE STRAPS ARE

In a fall, the harness loads your body with up to 1,800 pounds, roughly **nine times the weight of a 200-pound worker**. Snug leg straps put that load on the big muscles of your thighs and pelvis. Loose leg straps put it on your groin and lower spine. A low chest strap lets your upper body fold forward and slip through. **The straps decide what breaks.**

03 SEVEN FIT CHECKS, EVERY TIME

CHECK **1**

IT IS THE RIGHT SIZE FOR YOUR BODY

Harnesses come in sizes. Only wear one a **competent person** has confirmed fits you. Too big and the straps sit in the wrong places, or you slide out. Too small and it is painful, so you loosen it, which is the same as not wearing it.

CHECK **2**

DORSAL D-RING CENTERED BETWEEN THE SHOULDER BLADES

29 CFR 1926.502(d)(17): the attachment point is **in the center of the wearer's back near shoulder level**. Off to one side, a fall spins you and loads one shoulder strap. Too low, it folds you forward. Have a partner check it. You cannot see your own back.

CHECK **3**

CHEST STRAP ACROSS THE CHEST, SNUG

Mid-chest, roughly armpit level. **Too low or too loose** and your upper body pitches forward in a fall and you roll out of the shoulder straps. **Too high** and it rides up into your throat when the lanyard catches.

CHECK **4**

SHOULDER STRAPS SNUG, NOT TWISTED

Snug enough that they cannot slip off a shoulder. Flat, not twisted. A twisted strap is narrower, which concentrates the arresting force on a thin line of webbing.

CHECK 5

LEG STRAPS HIGH AND TIGHT, UNDER THE SEAT

Leg straps go **under your buttocks**, snug against the top of each thigh. Loose or low leg straps are the single most common fit failure. In a fall they ride up hard into the groin, and the whole harness shifts upward.

CHECK 6

EVERY BUCKLE ENGAGED, EVERY TAIL TUCKED

Mating buckles fully seated, tongue buckles through the right hole, quick-connects clicked and tugged. Loose strap ends go into the keepers so they cannot snag or unbuckle. **One open buckle is a failed harness.**

CHECK 7

THE TWO-FINGER TEST

When it is adjusted right, you can slide **two flat fingers** between the strap and your body, and no more. Four fingers is loose. One finger is too tight to wear all day, and you will loosen it by 10 a.m.

04 ON ALL THE WAY, OR OFF ALL THE WAY

THE RULE **NO HALFWAY HARNESS**

The harness is a system. Half a system is zero.

✗ **DON'T LOOSEN IT FOR LUNCH**

Unbuckling a leg strap to sit comfortably, dropping the chest strap to cool off, letting the shoulder straps hang. You will forget to put it back. Every fatality file has a worker who "was going to fix it" after the break. Loosened is the same as not worn.

✓ **PUT IT ON RIGHT, LEAVE IT RIGHT**

When you put the harness on, do the full seven checks and have a partner look at your back. Then leave every strap exactly where it is until you are done for the day and take it **all the way off**. If you must loosen it, you must re-do all seven checks before you go back up.

⚠ **AFTER A FALL, THE HARNESS IS DONE**

29 CFR 1926.502(d)(19): any fall arrest system subjected to impact loading must be **removed from service immediately** and not used again until a competent person inspects it and determines it is undamaged. Most manufacturers say destroy it. A harness that has caught one fall has stretched, and the stitching has done its job once. It will not do it twice.

05 WHY IT MATTERS

[JOBSITE]

FOR THE CREW

A crew that checks each other's harnesses at the gang box catches the loose leg strap and the sideways D-ring in ten seconds. Harness fit checks are also exactly what an OSHA inspector asks about under the training rule, 1926.503.

[INDIVIDUAL]

FOR YOU

The harness is the last thing between you and the ground. It is also the only piece of gear that can hurt you if it is on wrong. Thirty seconds of adjustment is the whole difference.

[HOME]

FOR LIFE OFF-SITE

The same gear shows up at home: climbing harnesses, tree stands, roof work on your own house. Fit matters there too, and nobody is checking your back.

06 TODAY'S DRILL

TODAY'S DRILL **PARTNER CHECK**

Pair up. Each of you puts your harness on the way you normally do. Then your partner runs the seven checks on you, out loud, starting with the D-ring between your shoulder blades. Fix anything that fails. Then switch. Anyone whose harness is the wrong size, damaged, or has been through a fall tells the foreman before going up.

07 CREW DISCUSSION

Take 2 minutes. Pick one.

1. Which strap do you loosen during the day? Be honest. What would it take to leave it alone?
2. When did somebody last check the back of your harness? Who on this crew would you trust to do it every morning?
3. Has anyone been in or seen a fall arrest? What did the harness do to the person wearing it?

08 ATTENDANCE & SIGN-OFF

All attendees confirm they participated in this Toolbox Talk and understand the content covered.

NAME (PRINT)	SIGNATURE

SUPERVISOR SIGNATURE

_____ Date: _____

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