

Anchor Lines vs Lifelines

Anchor lines and lifelines are both common pieces of equipment used when working at heights. Each plays a necessary role in ensuring workers remain safe while accessing elevated positions where there is a risk of a fall, but they are not interchangeable. That means it is important to know which to use in a given circumstance. What follows is a brief overview of the two, and which applications they're best suited for.

As its name suggests, an anchor line refers to a point on an anchor device or structural anchor to which personal fall protection equipment is connected. A lifeline on the other hand is a flexible or rigid line made from rope, webbing or steel wire that is temporarily anchored either between two points (horizontally) or to a single point above the user (vertically).

These are some of the factors to consider when deciding on the best solution for a job at hand:

1

NUMBER OF PEOPLE WORKING

Anchor lines are a great support when working at heights but are limited to only one worker at a time. This means that if multiple workers need to perform duties in the same area, multiple anchor lines would be required. If there are enough anchor lines available, however, then they are often the suitable choice, bearing in mind the other factors that must be considered before making an informed decision.

Occasions may arise when more than one individual is required to perform a duty in the same area, and thus a single anchor

line would not be sufficient. For example, when cleaning a façade, a number of workers would need to be able to access the length of the building. In this case, a lifeline would be the right choice because it would make provisions for more than one individual to work on the system at a given time (within the specified limits of the manufacturer's instructions).

2

TYPE OF MOVEMENT REQUIRED

Anchor lines are most suitable for individuals working within a limited area. This means the worker should be able to connect once and complete their task without having to move beyond the range provided by their safety equipment.

Should the task require the individual to cover a larger area, then a horizontal

lifeline would be recommended. This would remove the need for multiple disconnections and reconnections at different anchor lines, and keep the worker connected to the lifeline at all times. This is key to ensuring safety, especially over long periods where fatigue could set in.

3

WORK ENVIRONMENT

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4

COMBINATION OF SYSTEMS

When working at heights, the optimal solution will always be the one that ensures the greatest safety for the worker. In many cases, it is not necessarily a decision between fixed anchor lines and lifelines, but rather a consideration as to which to use when.

Take for example, a worker needs to climb a ladder in order to reach the point where work needs to be conducted across a large area. In this case, it would be highly recommended that the individual is first attached to a temporary vertical lifeline for their ascent up the ladder. Once the worker reaches the top of the ladder, they would connect to a fixed anchor line to ensure their safety while installing a temporary horizontal lifeline. From here

they would connect to the lifeline and carry out their task. This combination approach would ensure their safety at every point, as they would be connected to a fall arrest system at all times.

Ultimately, it is best practice to conduct a proper assessment of the workspace prior to conducting work from heights. In this way, the specific requirements of the site and task can be determined to ensure a solution is chosen that fits the circumstances. This could be an anchor point, lifeline, or combination of both, always with the goal of ensuring the safest conditions for workers at any given time.