

FALL ARREST VS FALL RESTRAINT

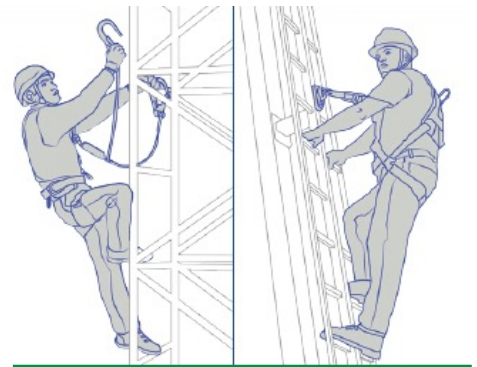
Working at heights exposes workers to different fall risks. It is important to understand when and how these risks can be controlled. Before understanding this, we need to know how fall protection is categorised.

Fall Protection can be defined as the overarching term for fall arrest, fall restraint and fall prevention. It is important to understand these definitions as this is what will define both the equipment and the methods that you use to remain safe while working at a height where the risk of fall is present.

FALL ARREST

When we talk about fall arrest, we are referring to a position of working at a height where the person must use personal protective equipment designed to arrest their fall, should the need arise. Situations like this could include climbing up and down a fixed ladder, working on a telecoms tower and even working on a wind turbine.

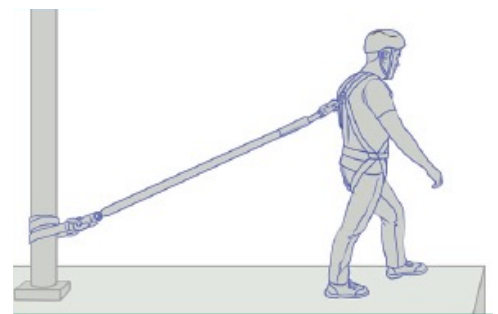
Working in a position where there is a direct risk of a fall, requires that the correct fall arrest device be used to prevent the individual from sustaining a serious injury when falling. For example, a person working on a fall arrest position at a height of 3m would not be stopped from hitting the ground when using a double shock absorbing lanyard. In such an instance the use of a mobile fall arrestor or inertia reel would be advised. These devices are designed to stop a fall almost immediately, thereby lessening the distance of the total fall.



FALL RESTRAINT

Fall restraint on the other hand is a position of working at a height where there is no immediate risk of falling, but it could happen that the person, if not properly protected by the use of equipment, could get into a position where they can fall. Examples of such situations could include working on unprotected flat roof tops or working where there are unprotected floor openings.

Fall restraint is thus the method used by workers to safely connect themselves at a height in such a way that will prevent or restrict movement into an unprotected area, as seen in the image below:



HIERARCHY OF CONTROLS IN FALL PROTECTION

When deciding which is the best method of fall protection to be used, a full risk assessment must be conducted. The risk assessment would look at the hierarchy of controls for fall risks and will provide enough information for the user to choose the correct method.

While fall arrest and fall restraint methods each come with their own set of risks and the hierarchy of controls puts the one method as safer than the other, there are situations where working in a fall arrest position is unavoidable and therefore the correct equipment and training must be provided for.



FALL ARREST VERSUS FALL RESTRAINT

When deciding between the two methods, it can be seen that neither method is necessarily better than the other. Rather, the safest option will be dependent on the working environment, the scope of work that needs to be performed and the access method that has been chosen (i.e. ladders, scaffolding, MEWP, etc.).

Only after conducting a site-specific risk assessment and considering the scope of work, can one establish which of the fall protection methods should be implemented. This, together with the correct equipment and competence training, will result in the safest protection for the individual against falling and sustaining injuries while working at a height.