Student's name

Instructor's name

Course

Date

Fall Protection in the Construction Industry: Progress through the Ages

Construction is one of the most inherently dangerous places of work due to its conditions, such as the regular use of complicated machinery at great heights. Nonetheless, contemporary construction is much safer than it was only a century ago thanks to new fall protection adjustments enforced in the field. In brief, fall protection in construction has come a long way from limited safety measures through the introduction of the Occupational Health and Safety Act to safety requirements in residential home construction sites.

Without the Occupational Health and Safety Act established in 1970, the full responsibility for personal safety and life lied on workers, while any fall protection was almost absent. Up to the 1970s, employers were dismissed from accountability for the safety of their workers, and even in case of falls, they tended to avoid any charges. Besides, there was no particular law linked to fall protection in construction, so safety measures were limited to verbal cautions, warning signs, and labels only. Safety equipment included body belts, which yet could not save workers from injuries and even lethal outcomes in the case of an "incorrect" fall. What is worse, the vast majority of builders refused to wear any protective equipment, being convinced that the latter restricted their movement and was time-consuming. As a result, limited fall

protection before the 1970s resulted in an estimated death rate of 14,000 workers a year (Fernandez-Solis and Harshavardhan 3). The worst part is that employers were rarely held liable for those fatalities.

The situation changed with the enforcement of the Occupational Health and Safety Act in the early 1970s as well as with the creation of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). The latter referred to the agency that had to enforce and control the safety standards in the U.S. workplaces and started to monitor safety in construction on a legislative level. Respectively, OSHA initiated the practice of conducting inspections at construction job sites (Din, Rahman and Gibson 2). The agency also made fall protection the priority in the construction field, enforcing basic safety requirements at sites and hefty fines for ignorance. Beginning with developing safety guidelines, such as the use of ropes or enclosed walkways, OSHA promoted workplace training for fall protection. The agency also invested in research to find out the most productive ways to protect builders working at certain altitudes. The body harness discovered in the mid-1990s was probably the most promising equipment they researched. Distributing weight more efficiently, this equipment prevented workers from injuries, not only from deaths.

By the new millennium, the only aspect of construction that OSHA could not regulate was fall protection in residential home construction, so they decided to expand their influence to this sphere too. Until 2010, fall protection standards did not relate to the residential construction industry, as the agency believed that individuals are able to control their safety on their own. However, the case reports of fatalities between 2005 and 2010 proved that fall protection, for instance, in residential roofing was three times lower than in the average construction trade

(Moore and Wagner 268). Consequently, OSHA adjusted its standards to personal fall protection, for example, by distinguishing the maximum height level or deceleration distance.

Throughout time, fall protection in the construction industry has undergone significant changes. At first, builders were limited to occasional safety measures, while employers were rarely accountable for injuries and casualties. With the creation of the Occupational Health and Safety Administration, the field started to be more regulated, with particular fall protection standards and punishments for their ignorance. The last changes to fall protection legislature took place almost a decade ago when OSHA decided to systematize laws in the residential construction industry. Overall, the development of laws in fall protection significantly increased the level of safety and reliability in the construction industry.

Works Cited

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