Suspension Trauma

WHAT’S AT STAKE?

Suspension trauma can occur to anyone who is forced to remain upright, as when you are in a body harness for a long time. The blood in your body pools in your legs and your heart cannot exert enough force to pump the blood back up. Eventually you faint. If you fall over, the blood can flow back to your heart; if not, there may be severe consequences.

WHAT’S THE DANGER?

If you work in a harness or in a confined space and must be in an upright position for a long time, you can experience a number of problems, as the blood pools in your legs.

These problems can include becoming faint, dizzy, nauseous, experiencing a slowdown of your heart rate and lowering of your blood pressure.

Staying in an upright position for as little as 30 minutes may result in death from a condition called ‘suspension trauma.?

EXAMPLE

A worker in a fall protection system who loses his support may end up being suspended in an upright position for an extended period of time. In as little as three minutes, the worker experiences the first symptoms of shock, and death may come in as little as 30 minutes.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

You can act to protect yourself from suspension trauma:

1. One way is to move into a sitting position, if possible.
2. Kick against a hard surface, if you can, to help keep blood

from pooling in your legs.
3. Try to avoid staying in an upright, immobile position for an extended period of time.
4. Also, make sure that anyone at risk for suspension trauma is not left alone for a long period of time.

Workers who use fall arrest harnesses should be trained to know when the devices are properly fitted and worn:

- They should also know how suspension trauma may occur and what factors increase the risk of suspension trauma.
- Workers should also be trained to recognize the signs and symptoms of suspension trauma.
- Finally, workers should be trained in the proper rescue procedures and the methods to reduce risk while suspended.

FINAL WORD

Anyone can fall victim to the injuries and hazards posed by being upright for a long time. Prevent injuries and possible death by knowing how to protect yourself from this type of accident and what to do if an accident like this occurs in your workplace.