



STOP the DROP Task Force



Tool Tethering Best Practices

When working at heights, it's best and common practice to think about personal fall protection equipment, like wearing a harness. What also needs to be considered is fall protection for our tools. Especially when working from heights when others are below, we need to ensure our tools are tethered and secured from potential drops. Tool tethering is a way to mitigate and prevent tools from falling or being dropped from heights. It involves attaching tools to either the person using them or, in the case of heavier tools, to a fixed anchor point.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) from 2022 there are over 179,000 incidents per year in the U.S. where someone is struck by a falling object. This is equivalent to almost 490 injuries every day, or more than 3 every 10 minutes. However, this figure only includes incidents that are OSHA recordable and does not account for the many unreported incidents.

Barricades, control access zones (CAZ's) and netting on elevated work platforms can help mitigate dropped objects, but tool tethering is one of the most effective ways to prevent these types of incidents from happening. Think of tool tethering simply as fall protection for tools. As with fall protection for yourself, the proper set up for tool fall protection or tool tethering, requires three elements:

1. The tool, (What needs to be secured?)
2. The tether/lanyard (How are you going to secure it?) and
3. The attachment/anchor point. (What are you going to attach it to?)

These three elements work together to form a safety system for your tools.

The first thing to consider is the weight of the tool (or object) to be tethered and to properly match the rated capacity of the tether. Best practice is to use a higher rated tether than the tool to include a safety factor. Using a higher rated capacity tether may be uncomfortable and more expensive than using a like-rated tether, but it can save a life if a tool is dropped.

It is also important to have an attachment point on the tool or to be able to firmly attach the tether to the tools handle. Some tools have attachment points as part of their design, while others, you can use different devices available to attach the tethers to.

Next, consider the necessary length of the tether so that you can comfortably reach the work and properly use the tool when it's anchored. Keep in mind that excess slack may become a snag hazard for walking or climbing ladders. There are tethers that are designed to be anchored to your belt, your wrist or even your hard hat; and others that are designed to be anchored to a scaffold, tool bag or the man basket. Ensure you are following manufactures weight limits and recommendations when choosing an anchor point.

Take some time to review the working at heights hazards on your jobsite. If dropped objects are a concern, consider adding tool tethering to your safety program and help prevent dropped object incidents from happening on your projects.



Spud Wrench



Screw Driver



Hammer



Pliers



Drill

Remember, every tool can be tethered!

Through the OSHA and AGC Alliance, the Stop the Drop Task Force developed this toolbox talk for informational purposes only. It does not necessarily reflect the official views of OSHA or the U.S. Department of Labor. 10/2024