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SAFETY AND HEALTH TOPIC SHEET NO. 12: HAZARD IDENTIFICATION AND RISK ASSESSMENT

A safety and health 'topic sheet' aimed at raising awareness of hazards in the rope access industry. The series may be of use as a toolbox talk.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 As well as being a legislative requirement, hazard identification and risk assessment are important. Undertaking work at a height introduces increased risk. In simple terms:

- a **hazard** is something that has the potential to cause harm to any person, property or animal; and
- a **risk** is the likelihood of that harm actually occurring.

2 WHAT CAN GO WRONG …

2.1 Even the simplest of tasks can carry an increased level of risk when undertaken at height, e.g. changing a battery or a drill bit can result in a serious incident if they are dropped. Likewise, a relatively small injury, sprain or muscle tear can become very serious when working at height. Any number of small incidents can be increased in severity when happening at height.

Case study
A wind turbine nacelle was incorrectly isolated by the on-site supervisor. As a result, the nacelle rotated slightly whilst two rope access technicians were descending over the edge at the top of the nacelle. - The technicians immediately made themselves safe and called the on-site supervisor. The work was put on hold whilst the rope access team and on-site supervisor investigated what had gone wrong. No one was hurt.

3 WHY THINGS CAN GO WRONG …

3.1 Managers, supervisors and technicians sometimes underestimate things with the potential to cause harm (the hazard). They do not:

(a) check manufacturers' instructions;

(b) look back at accident and ill-health records – that may help identify the less obvious hazards;

(c) think about the issues that surround the rope access work itself;

(d) take into account the advice and guidance available, e.g. ICOP.

3.2 Those involved do not always understand the risk assessment process. Sometimes, the technicians are not consulted.

4 WHAT YOU CAN DO …

4.1 You should:

(a) accurately identify potential hazards in your workplace;
(b) think how employees might be harmed (or others who may be present, such as contractors or visitors);
(c) decide how likely it is that harm will occur, i.e. the level of risk, and what to do about it;
(d) make a record of significant findings;
(e) review what you are doing on an ongoing basis.

4.2 All those involved in a task can contribute to hazard identification and risk assessment. You may not have been involved in the initial planning, but risk assessment is a continual process and goes beyond the initial paperwork.

4.3 The 'SLAM' technique reminds workers to stop work if they think their health and safety is at risk:

Stop

- Stop the task and think. Look at each step.

Look

- Look before, during and after completion of the task.

Assess

- Are workers equipped to perform the task safely?
- What else do they need to perform the task safely?

Manage

- Managers or site rope access safety supervisors should take appropriate action to eliminate or minimise any hazards on site.

5 HOW YOU CAN DO IT …

5.1 Ensure that the process for risk assessment and hazard awareness used is:

- Site specific;
- Task specific;
- Comprehensive;
- Simple to understand;
- Continuous; and
- Inclusive of all those involved.

5.2 Ask:

- Is this a new task?
- Has the task changed?
- When was the last time I did this task?
- Do I feel comfortable doing this task?
- If not, do I need training?
- Are isolation(s) required?

6 ACTION

7.1 Review your management system's procedures for hazard identification and risk assessment.

7 REFERENCES

7.1 Further information can be found in:

(a) IRATA International code of practice for industrial rope access (Third edition, September 2016)[1]:
- Part 2, 2.4, Risk assessment
- Part 3, Annex A, Risk assessment

(b) Training, Assessment and Certification Scheme (TACS) for personnel engaged in industrial rope access methods (v005, 20/05/2021)[2]:
- 6.2.3, Hazard identification and risk assessment

7.2 For a list of current (and past) 'safety communications' by IRATA, see www.irata.org.

8 RECORD FORM

8.1 An example *Safety and Health Topic Sheet: Record Form* is given below. Members may have their own procedure(s) for recording briefings to technicians and others.

9 FURTHER READING

Risk assessment: A brief guide to controlling risks in the workplace, HSE, INDG163[3]

Leadership and worker involvement toolkit, The SLAM technique, HSE[4]

Leadership and worker involvement toolkit, HSE[5]

1 www.irata.org/downloads/2055
2 www.irata.org/downloads/2059
3 www.hse.gov.uk/pUbns/indg163.pdf
4 www.hse.gov.uk/construction/lwit/assets/downloads/slam.pdf
5 www.hse.gov.uk/construction/lwit/index.htm

IRATA SAFETY AND HEALTH TOPIC SHEET – RECORD FORM					
Site:					
Date:					
Topic(s) for discussion:			Topic Sheet No. 12: Hazard identification and risk assessment		
Reason for talk:					
Start time:			**Finish time:**		
Attended by *Please sign to verify understanding of briefing*					
Print name:			**Signature:**		
Continue overleaf (where necessary)					
Matters raised by employees:			**Action taken as a result:**		
Continue overleaf (where necessary)					
Briefing leader *I confirm I have delivered this briefing and have questioned those attending on the topic discussed.*					
Print name:		**Signature:**		**Date:**	
Comments:					