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SAFETY AND HEALTH TOPIC SHEET NO. 29: DIRECT SUPERVISION AND PRE-USE CHECKS

This safety and health 'topic sheet' aims to:

- *raise awareness on the subjects of supervising technicians and the importance of pre-use checks on rigging and equipment before use.*

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 A number of incidents have been reported to IRATA International which have sadly resulted in serious injuries to rope access technicians. These incidents and injuries may have been prevented by ensuring the correct level and type of on site supervision and by employing a robust process and procedure for pre work and pre use checking.

1.2 The information from the 'IRATA International Code of Practice' (ICOP) [TC-102ENG] below specifically relates to the guidance provided for supervision and pre-work checking:

- **Section 1.4.3 - Quality and safety controls, Clause 1.4.3.7**

"There are three levels (grades) of rope access technician: Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3, the third level being the highest. All worksites operated by IRATA International member companies have at least one **IRATA Level 3 rope access safety supervisor on site as the person responsible for the safety of the rope access systems and the Level 1 and Level 2 rope access technicians who work under their supervision.** An IRATA International rope access team consists of at least two rope access technicians, one of whom has to be an IRATA International Level 3 rope access safety supervisor. Lone working is not allowed."

- **Section 2.11.7 - Pre-work checking, Clause 2.11.7.4**

"Rope access technicians should carefully examine their own equipment, e.g. harnesses; anchor line devices; device lanyards; connectors, before starting work, to ensure it is in good condition. This is known as pre-use checking. The rope access safety supervisor should ensure this occurs. This checking should continue during the course of the job. In addition, there should be a further check by another member of the team, known as buddy checking, to ensure, for example, that each other's harness buckles are correctly fastened and adjusted, that device lanyards and anchor lanyards are attached correctly and that connectors are fastened correctly. Buddy checking by team members is good practice and should be continued throughout the day, including:

- a) after the rope access technician has put on his/her harness and assembled his/her equipment;
- b) when the rope access technician has attached to the anchor lines;
- c) at all times when the rope access technician is engaged in rope access manoeuvres."

- **Section 2.11.7 - Pre-work checking, Clause 2.11.7.5**

"At the beginning of each working day and at other times as appropriate, e.g. when the anchor lines are relocated during the day, the rope access safety supervisor should carry out a pre-use check to ensure that all the anchors and anchor lines (wire and textile), and the structure or natural feature to which they are attached, are satisfactory. This pre-use check should include any points on the anchor lines where abrasion or other damage, e.g. caused by hot surfaces, could occur. The rope access safety supervisor should also take responsibility for checking anchor lines for length and that, where appropriate, termination stopper knots are in place and secure."

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2 WHAT CAN GO WRONG (EXAMPLE CASE STUDIES)

Case Study 1

A technician working on a high rise building comes back from lunch and reconnects to his ropes from the balcony 2 floors below the rigging point. The technician then climbs off the balcony leans back into his harness and drops 3 floors before the ropes catch and arrest the technicians fall.

This fall of nearly 10 metres results in some minor injuries to the technician, who then descended to the ground and was taken from site to have his injuries checked in the hospital.

The technician suffered some bruising from impact with the structure, and discomfort from the harness when the fall was arrested.

On investigation it was shown that the supervising technician had pulled the ropes up and coiled them above to prevent them being interfered with at ground level, the coil had been tucked firmly into a corner of the steel above, this meant that when the technician connected below, the ropes did not uncoil or shift until more weight was put on them.

Case Study 2

A technician de-rigging the ropes after a particularly long day is disconnecting slings and karabiners from the steel work on a platform, noticing a set lower down which can be accessed and de-rigged by descending the ropes above, the technician connects to the set and drops off the side of the platform.

The ropes the technician connected to had been previously disconnected but had been left in situ, this resulted in the technician falling to the deck below landing on the handrail and breaking ribs and an arm.


The technician was working alone at a relatively low level whilst the supervisor was on the deck below receiving the de-rigged equipment.

3 WHY THINGS CAN GO WRONG ...

- Suitable pre-use checks were not carried out on the rigging before use.
- Supervisors whilst present for the operations were not actively supervising the works being undertaken.
- Buddy checks were not carried out. A second set of eyes may have noticed the issues.
- Ropes were not stored in a safe manner to ensure against accidental use.
- Assumptions were made perhaps due to tiredness or complacency regarding the suitability and safety of the equipment and working methods.

4 WHAT YOU CAN DO...

- Pre use checks of rigging and equipment before connection and use.
- Supervisors are responsible for ensuring the safety and safe operations of those that they are supervising, this must be the priority in what they are doing.
- Buddy checks are a relatively quick, yet affective means to ensure that equipment and rigging is safe for use. Rope access teams consist of a minimum of two members one being a safety supervisor. This helps ensure the safety and safe practices of all members of the team.
- Remove ropes from use when disconnected, and ensure ropes are not left in an unsafe manner.
- Where possible and practicable check and verify your own ropes and rigging before connecting to them and using them.

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5 ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Safe behaviours** - Do not make assumptions regarding safety, nobody plans to have an accident, and most are preventable, so behaving in a safe and cautious manner is a positive behaviour.
- **Pre-start briefings** - These can be a useful tool when returning to the worksite to ensure that everything is as it should be before works take place.
- **Teamwork** - Safety is the responsibility of all those involved, team work and communication help to promote safe working actions and environments.
- **Time management** - Undertaking potentially dangerous tasks at the end of a long shift can increase the risk. A tendency to cut corners and split up to enable the job to be finished quicker can result in disastrous consequences.

6 REFERENCES

- 6.1 Topic Sheets:
- No 5 - Safe Rigging of Rope Access Equipment [HS-085ENG]
 - No 22 - Belief-Based Safety [HS-251ENG]
- 6.2 Further information can be found in the 'IRATA International Code of Practice' (ICOP) [TC-102ENG].
- 6.3 For a list of current and archived IRATA Safety Communications see www.irata.org.

7 RECORD FORM

- 7.1 An example 'IRATA Safety and Health Topic Sheet: Record Form' is given below. Members may have their own procedure(s) for recording briefings to technicians and other.

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Site			
Date			
Topic(s) for discussion		Topic Sheet No. 29: Direct Supervision and Pre-use Checks	
Reason for talk			
Start time		Finish time	
Attended by <i>Please sign to verify understanding of briefing</i>			
Print name		Signature	
<i>Continue overleaf (where necessary)</i>			
Matters raised by employees		Action taken as a result	
<i>Continue overleaf (where necessary)</i>			
Briefing leader <i>I confirm I have delivered this briefing and have questioned those attending on the topic discussed.</i>			
Print name		Signature	Date
Comments			