



International Window Cleaning Association

7918 Jones Branch Drive, Suite 300 • McLean, VA 22102
Phone: 703-971-7771 or 800-875-4922 • Fax: 703-971-7772
Email: iwca@aol.com • Web: <http://www.iwca.org>

Directorate of Enforcement Programs (DEP)
U.S. Dept. of Labor, OSHA
200 Constitution Avenue, NW, Room N-3119
Washington, DC 20210

(202) 693-1681 FAX

Sent by USPO, February 1st, 2018

To the Attention of: Thomas Galassi, Director and Patrick Kapust, Deputy Director;

The International Window Cleaning Association (IWCA) represents thousands of professional window cleaners who use Rope Descent Systems (RDS) on a daily basis. The mission of the IWCA is to develop and promote standards of workplace safety, education advocacy and research to promote the success of the industry and ensure safe and healthy workplaces for its professional members.

The IWCA and its membership have been actively fulfilling this mission statement since its inception in 1989. IWCA and OSHA have worked together cooperatively on this mission since our Alliance was formed in 2010.

Our active participation at this mission has helped to reduce the number of fatalities and incidents in the high rise window cleaning sector by nearly 40 percent over the last 15 years. Over 85 percent of the windows being cleaned at occupied and un-occupied high rise buildings in the USA are done so by professionals using Rope Descending Systems.

Our concern with the safety, health and well-being of the workers and trade that we represent is the reason we hereby request that OSHA issue a letter of interpretation which would clarify a misconception which has developed as a result of the publication of the revisions to Walking and Working Surfaces in OSHA CFR 1910.21 and 1910.27.

In section 1910.21, OSHA defines a rope descending system as: Rope descent system means a suspension system that allows an employee to descend in a controlled manner and, as needed, stop at any point during the descent. A rope descent system usually consists of a roof anchorage, support rope, a descent device, carabiner(s) or shackle(s), and a chair (seatboard). A rope descent system also is called controlled descent equipment or apparatus. Rope descent systems do not include industrial rope access systems.

The underlined sentence is what has caused a misconception among stakeholders in the industries which contract with or those who actually are users of synthetic fiber rope for access to occupied and un-occupied structures.

Based upon testimony in the preamble to the final rule and the extensive experience with rope descending equipment by our industry, we are fully aware of the differences between a rope descent system and an industrial rope access system.

The Society of Professional Rope Access Technicians, (SPRAT) defines industrial rope access (IRA) as: Rope access: A means of access by descending or ascending a main line while the worker is protected by a safety line. Rope access also includes the use of climbing and aid climbing techniques with fall protection.

It is clear to professional members of the window cleaning industry as well as those of the professional rope access industry, that the differences between RDS and IRA are only specific to the fact that IRA systems are used primarily for rescue as well as used infrequently and temporarily for extremely difficult access to areas on occupied and unoccupied structures which cannot be accessed safely and practicably by other means. The use of industrial rope access systems consists of additional equipment to provide unconventional and non-routine access by use of rope based skills at occupied or un-occupied structures (on or offshore), geological features (such as cliff faces), or manmade features (such as dams).

On the other hand, RDS are used frequently and multiple times (millions of descents performed annually as stated in the preamble to the Final Rule) to perform routine maintenance, such as window cleaning, power washing, caulking, painting, etc.. A RDS may often be the permanently designated method for accessing an occupied building's façade and windows when an anchorage point system has been inspected, tested, certified and maintained as prescribed in OSHA CFR 1910.27 and routine maintenance is performed on a semiannual basis.

However, if an industrial rope access system is used at a building in a manner which allows a worker to descend in a controlled manner and as needed, stop at any point during the descent to perform work, then it is being used as a rope descent system as defined by OSHA in CFR 1910.21. The use of a seatboard is optional with RDS and IRAS and does not define either of the two systems.

The State of California specifically excludes the use of Industrial Rope Access Equipment for window cleaning and exterior building maintenance. CCR Title 8, Section 3270. (Copy attached)

The State of New York declares that IRA cannot be used until an application for its use is approved by the DOL and recognizes them a single point suspension systems which are to be used only for visual inspection and/or non-destructive investigation and no repairs or construction work may be performed by IRAS. (Copy attached)

Our request for a clarification is as follows:

Because the definition in CFR 1910.21 states that rope descent systems do not include industrial rope access systems. Was it OSHA's intention that all the requirements of Section 1910.27, particularly the identification and certification of anchorages; do not apply to a building owner or employer and employee when an industrial rope access system is being used at a building to perform work in the same manner that a rope descending system would be used? Or conversely, was it OSHA's intention that the requirements of Section 1910.27 do apply when an industrial rope access system is being used to perform work in the same manner that a rope descending system would be used?

We thank you for prompt consideration of this request.

Please feel free to contact us if you wish to discuss further.

Sincerely,

Jason York
President
International Window Cleaning Association

This information is provided free of charge by the Department of Industrial Relations from its web site at www.dir.ca.gov. These regulations are for the convenience of the user and no representation or warranty is made that the information is current or accurate. See full disclaimer at http://www.dir.ca.gov/od_pub/disclaimer.html.

Subchapter 7. General Industry Safety Orders Group 1. General Physical Conditions and Structures

Article 4. Access, Work Space, and Work Areas §3270.1. Use of Rope Access Equipment.

[Return to index](#)

[New query](#)

§3270.1. Use of Rope Access Equipment.

(a) Scope and Application. This section establishes safety requirements for rope access and the use, care and maintenance of rope access equipment as defined in Section 3207. Rope supported work shall be permitted only when other means of access are not feasible or would increase the risk of injury to the employee and/or the public. The requirements of this section include, but are not limited to, the inspection of dams and spillways, access to interior or exterior structural and architectural components of buildings, highway/bridge inspection and maintenance, and access to powerplant penstocks.

Exception: (1) Window cleaning and exterior building maintenance as regulated by Articles 5 and 6 of these Orders; (2) Emergency search and rescue operations; (3) Entertainment performances and rehearsals.

(b) Approval. Rope access equipment shall be approved for its intended use as defined in Section 3206 of these Orders.

(c) Training.

(1) The employer shall establish, implement and maintain a written Code of Safe Practices for rope access work. The written Code of Safe Practices shall include, but not be limited to the following elements:

- a. Methods of rope access and anchorage used by the employer.
- b. Employee selection criteria.
- c. Equipment selection and inspection criteria.
- d. Roles and responsibilities of rope access team members.
- e. Communication systems.
- f. Employee training program.

g. Rescue and emergency protocol.

h. Identification of any unique site hazards that may affect the safety of employees using rope access methods.

(2) Employees shall be trained in accordance with the Code of Safe Practices, including rescue techniques. The employer shall evaluate the competence of the employee to perform rope access in accordance with the Code of Safe Practices including a hands-on demonstration by the employee of his/her rope access skills.

(3) Employees who perform rope access shall receive annual refresher training. The training shall include a reevaluation (e.g., hands-on demonstration) of the employee's ability to perform rope access in accordance with the Code of Safe Practices.

(4) Documentation of employee training shall be maintained as required by Section 3203 of these Orders.

(d) Equipment Inspection and Maintenance.

(1) The manufacturer's recommendations for use, care, inspection and maintenance of rope access equipment shall be followed.

(2) A qualified person shall inspect rope access equipment each day before and after use to determine that the equipment is safe for its intended use.

(3) Damaged or defective rope access equipment shall be immediately removed from service.

(e) Anchorage. Anchorages shall be sufficient to safety support at least twice the maximum anticipated dynamic load imposed upon them as determined by a qualified person.

(f) Personal Protective Equipment. Employees performing rope access work shall be provided personal protective equipment in accordance with Article 10 of these Orders.

(g) There shall be at least two trained employees present when rope access equipment and techniques are used.

(h) Trainer Qualifications. Employees who use rope access equipment and/or perform rope access shall be trained by persons with the qualifications and experience necessary to effectively instruct the employee in the proper fundamentals of rope access, equipment, and techniques as described in subsection (c) of this section.

(i) The employer shall provide for the prompt rescue of employees in case of equipment malfunction or a fall, or shall assure that employees are able to rescue themselves.

(j) A safety, secondary, belay, or backup line, or other appropriate fall arrest device shall be used when the main line is the primary means of support, unless the employer can demonstrate that the second line or other fall arrest device would create a greater hazard or would otherwise be infeasible.

(1) When a safety line is used in conjunction with the main line, each line shall be provided with a separate anchor, and shall be separately fixed to the employee's harness. This shall not prohibit both lines from being attached to a single harness attachment point.

(k) Precautions (e.g., barricades, warning lines) shall be taken to control vehicular traffic and/or prevent unauthorized persons from walking or working beneath employees performing rope access operations.

(l) The employer shall conduct a pre-rope access briefing to discuss the objective(s) of the rope access work to be performed, any unusual site-specific hazards or environmental conditions that could affect the safety of the employee, and emergency procedures to be followed (e.g., employee rescue).

NOTE

Authority cited: Section 142.3, Labor Code. Reference: Section 142.3, Labor Code.

HISTORY

1. New section filed 8-4-2000; operative 9-3-2000 (Register 2000, No. 31)

 [Go Back to Article 1 Table of Contents](#)

Menu



Search

Construction Safety Compliance Worker Safety Specialty Units

Select 

- Emergency Response Team
- Cranes & Derricks
- Elevators
- Facades
- Padlocks
- Scaffolds & Sheds
- Signs
- Specialty Unit Frequently Asked Questions

Industrial Rope Access Application Procedure

Industrial Rope Access refers to techniques by which access is gained to the exterior walls of buildings or other structures (such as monuments) by means of ropes. It applies to all cases where:

- People descend or ascend on a rope;
- Ropes are used as the primary means of support for these individuals; and
- Ropes are used as the primary means of protection or positioning for these individuals.

In the interest of public safety, any person using industrial rope access technology, and swing or support seats as indicated below, as a form of single-point adjustable suspension scaffolding shall be a Licensed Rigger (Special or Master Rigger) and shall submit a Suspended Scaffold Application (CD5) – formerly known as the Notification of Staging and Outrigger Beam Use By Special Riggers form – to the Cranes & Derricks Unit.

The applicant must meet the requirements of the New York City Building Code Building as well as the requirements for filing Hanging Scaffold Applications, including the maintenance of a valid Rigger's License and insurance (which includes general liability, disability, and workers' compensation), and the submission of all supporting documentation, including plans locating support points, lifelines, support lines, and site protection at street level.

Each applicant shall provide the CD5 application stating the following:

1. All persons using individual support lines will be either:
 - under the direct supervision of the applicant and either Society of Professional Rope Access Technicians (SPRAT) or Industrial Rope Access Trade Association (IRATA) certified or
 - licensed engineers/architects trained in accordance with SPRAT or IRATA guidelines and on full-belay (an active system that is operated by the applicant or a person under the applicant's direct supervision for the purpose of arresting the fall of a rope access worker). All rigging/scaffolding is in compliance with Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) (link to <https://www.osha.gov/index.html>) regulations.
2. All rigging/scaffolding is in compliance with Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations.
3. All ropes, harnesses, and rigging equipment will be inspected and the inspections will be entered into a log by a qualified person (as defined by OSHA) within 24 hours of use on site.
4. All equipment will meet the standards and recommendations set forth in the Safe Practices for Rope Access Work (SPRAT) or in the Industrial Rope Access Trade Association (IRATA) International Guidelines.
5. All equipment will be securely tethered to the person/harness while each individual is suspended.
6. Single-point suspension lines will be used only for visual inspection and/or non-destructive investigation and no construction work or repairs will be performed.
7. If an individual will be suspended on the industrial rope access equipment for over a one and one-half hour period, a swing or support seat will also be used.
8. The maximum load will not exceed 250 pounds per line (per OSHA).

The following shall be kept at the site and made available for inspection by the Department:

- Copies of the CD5 application and approved drawings
- Certificates of fitness or Rigger's License for all persons on the lines (unless such persons are Licensed Engineers/Architects)
- Proof of certification from either SPRAT or IRATA for all persons on the lines (unless such persons are Licensed Engineers/Architects)
- A copy of the inspection log for the industrial rope access equipment

