



IRATA SAFETY BULLETIN SB 29

Unauthorised persons tampering with rope access equipment

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1. Summary

“While performing a rigging and rope systems check, one of our techs found one of our lifelines to be cut. This rope was clearly cut intentionally by someone else. It looked as if it has been cut to possibly be used as a haul or tag line. There is probably a 50-75 ft. section of the rope missing. It was not in the way of anyone or another ongoing job. The rope was intact yesterday when it was last used. These ropes have to be left up overnight due to the lengthy rigging process versus the little amount of actual time we are able to spend in the field.”

It goes without saying that rope access equipment represents the safety of human life therefore we must look after our equipment and be aware who is potentially tampering with it. Understandably we can only use reasonable precautions to ensure that no other work parties will cross our barriers and enter our work site to tamper with rope access equipment. It is not unheard of for third parties to interfere and / or damage rigged rope access equipment while technicians are on breaks or off shift. From the example above we can see the importance of pre use equipment inspections and of suitable exclusion zones with clear signage.

2. Recommendations

Although it is nearly impossible to stop third parties from entering, tampering or damaging rope access equipment whilst off shift or on breaks, by following the IRATA ICOP recommendations below it may help to deter these actions from happening;

2.10.1.4 It is essential that all load-bearing equipment is given a visual and tactile inspection by the user before each use to ensure that it is in a safe condition...”

2.11.8.3 Anchor area exclusion zone

2.11.8.3.1 An anchor area exclusion zone (also known as a rope access controlled area) should be cordoned off at anchor level with suitable barriers and warning signs. The anchor area exclusion zone should usually be large enough to include anchor points and to provide safe access to the working edge.

2.11.8.3.2 Only members of the rope access team should be allowed in the anchor area exclusion zone, unless under close supervision.”

2.11.8.2.3 Exclusion zones...People should be discouraged or prevented from entering the exclusion zone or interfering with the rigging by posting suitable notices, providing warning signs, erecting appropriate barriers or installing alarms....

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.

Another consideration could be the use of bag tags with a unique security seal threaded through the eyelets of the rope bag to prevent unauthorised tampering with rope access equipment. It may be necessary to have an additional person as sentry or guard to prevent unauthorised tampering with suspension equipment.