

With at-height work risks extending beyond individual safety, there is no room for complacency or non-compliance among wind energy personnel.

WHEN WORKING HUNDREDS OF FEET in the air, with ground level a dangerously long distance down, wearing equipment that either prevents or protects against a free fall seems like a “no-brainer.” However, even the most experienced workers can be complacent, ignoring the proper safety precautions and foregoing fall protection gear as they go about their daily routine.

While the majority of at-height workers follow safety regulations to the letter, there are still those who ignore or disregard the rules completely. Even if they have the most finely tuned skills and many years of experience, no company should tolerate workers who put themselves, the crew and the company at risk.

THE REAL DANGERS OF BEING ILL-EQUIPPED AND UNPROTECTED

The most obvious, and paramount, risks that come with disregarding fall protection regulations—serious injury and death—are often blatantly ignored. For some workers, the fear of a devastating fall, and the drastic lifestyle change that can result, is not enough to compel them to comply. They maintain the “this won’t happen to me” mindset, even though noncompliance poses real and irreversible dangers.

This is especially true with wind turbine work, which

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often takes place in isolated locales where rescue squads or emergency medical services would take longer to reach the accident scene. Wind energy personnel can’t afford to overlook fall protection that protects them from serious harm.

In addition to risking his or her own life, the non-compliant worker is also placing the company’s financial and psychological stability in jeopardy. In the aftermath of a fall that could have been arrested or even prevented with the proper precautions, companies can face serious economic consequences.

Every year, companies lose millions of dollars in lost work, insurance premiums, litigation and liability claims as a result of falls.

Besides fines and increased costs, even just one fall can take a tremendous toll on a crew’s mental and emotional health, often leading to sub-par job performance. Long after the fall victim has been safely lowered to ground level and received any necessary medical treatment, the accident still impacts the mindset of other workers and consequently their productivity.

The bottom line: The complex cost of falls is not worth the risk of an ill-equipped and unprepared worker. You can help instill a safety mentality in each and every one of your workers, even the ones that seemingly don’t care or don’t abide by the rules. Be proactive and be serious, and the benefits will extend beyond worker safety.

Be mindful of these helpful tips to encourage compliance:

- Don’t just say safety is a priority; show that it’s a priority. Send the message that fall protection is not worn just because OSHA requires it, but because the company values the safety and wellbeing of its employees above all else. Embed safety in the company culture from the top down and practice what you preach.
- Don’t be afraid to use scare tactics. Describe the potential impact of an accident on the worker’s family or loved ones. If you have to, share frightening facts or personal stories to emphasize the very real and likely consequences of noncompliance.
- Provide the best, most comfortable, user-friendly gear. Think about weight considerations, strategically-placed padding and soft, breathable and moisture-wicking materials that won’t rub or chafe. Lightweight, comfortable equipment won’t be a hindrance for workers to wear throughout an entire workday.
- Punish non-compliance. Take an uncompromising stance on non-compliance. Develop and enforce a policy that states how employees who do not abide by company and industry fall protection regulations will be disciplined.

No one is above safety regulations. No matter how highly trained or well experienced, gravity never takes a break. Your unwavering dedication to fall protection is key. Remember: workers will invest in you when they see you have invested in them. ↴