



# SAFETY ALERT

## SUSPENSION TRAUMA: THE FACTS

**Suspension Trauma or 'orthostatic intolerance' is a condition whereby a person suspended in a harness, in a substantially upright position, may experience blood pooling in the legs.**

**Depending on the susceptibility of the individual, this can result in unconsciousness, renal failure or even death, in the less than 30 minutes.**

It is a relatively recently discovered hazard and as such research is still in its infancy. However, there are certain things we know to be true; these are the factors that increase the risk, which include:

- The degree of inclination of the body
- Dehydration
- Hypothermia
- Shock
- Fatigue
- Consciousness
- The ability of the person to move their legs to assist circulation

The standard **AS/NZS 1891.4-2000 'Industrial Fall Arrest Systems and Devices Part 4: Selection, Use and Maintenance'** states that clinical tests revealed that people react differently to suspension effects, but clearly makes the point that in some cases that the effects begin after only a few minutes.

**This fact requires every user of height equipment to have an emergency rescue plan in place which enables an effective rescue of a suspended person within a short time frame e.g. 10 minutes**

The crucial component of the fall arrest system, with regards to suspension trauma, is provision for rescue. This issue needs to be addressed in the initial risk assessment and should be found in the *Work Method Statement*.

It is clear that an effective incident response plan is necessary to ensure that following an incident, the person can be removed from the suspended position as quickly as possible. This may include having a pre-rigged retrieval system in place.

Products such as the B-Safe automatic rescue/descent device, used in conjunction with the same brand rescue pole, enable the suspended casualty to be recovered. It does not require assistance from the fallen person, it can still be used if the casualty is unconscious.

The rescue device allows the casualty to be raised and freed from the deployed lanyard and then released to descend to the ground at a controlled speed to a safe area.

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