

Is Tower Rescue Over Your Head?



Training for a rescue situation is only the beginning of the answer. Workers must know their limitations, how to handle emotions, and refresh training on a continual basis.

By Steve Flemming

Life-threatening situations happen when you least expect them. For example, you've just finished a rescue training session, the sun is out, it's warm, the inspected rescue equipment is properly stored and ready on the truck, Henry (our rescuee) has just lost 83 pounds and is now a slim 165, and a crane just happens to be parked on the lot next door.

More likely, you and Henry are sent out to adjust an antenna at the last minute. Henry hasn't been on a tower for more than seven years. He starts the climb, gets halfway up the 110-foot tower and starts having chest pain. The last rescue class you had

was about three and a half years ago, it's raining, cold, windy, and the rescue equipment hasn't been used since the last class. To make matters worse, you are the only one around for 42 miles and your cellular phone battery just went dead!

The important part of this story is the reminder that you could be faced with a true emergency at any time. And even the best trained person operating in the best of conditions must handle the most extreme emotions a human can endure. In almost all cases involving tower construction/maintenance work, the injured (or worse) person is not only a co-worker, he's a friend. Because this person is a friend, it is even more important that the rescuer control his emotions. Compassion can make a person react to the situation in a hasty and harmful way. It is extremely important that a rescuer take at least

three seconds to stop, think and try to understand what just happened and what the appropriate course of action is. Evaluating the situation is one of the main objectives in a good training session. Understanding resources, training and limitations is imperative to a successful rescue.

ONCE IS NOT ENOUGH

Here are a few helpful tips for refreshing training:

- It is important to remember that as a training session starts, the responsibility of student learning is on the instructors. As the session goes on, the responsibility shifts to the student. At the end of the training session the responsibility lies totally on the student.
- Try to keep detailed records in a file (a three-ring binder or the like). Keep a personal file as well as a file for the company.
- Pictures are worth a thousand words. Video is even better. People like seeing themselves, so videotaping your past training sessions is one of the best ways of remembering/recalling the last training session.
- OSHA (1910.268 & 9) requires that tower “qualified climbers” train at least annually on simulated rescue, equipment inspection, fall protection, harnesses, documentation and hazard analysis. To be realistic, training should be a minimum of every six months.
- Keep complete records of all past training, job briefings, hazard analysis, instructor’s credentials and any other documents that might be important.
- Rescue skills are perishable. It is imperative that employees get the best training and, most important, that some type of refresher training is offered at least every six months.
- Listed are several items/objectives that can be covered: Technical manuals, field guides, past case history training videotapes and any edited training videotape of the actual training session. Again, this has proven to be an incredibly valuable training tool for that six-month review training session. I have found that the recall on the technical information is tenfold and, by scheduling several review sessions, the students can truly retain the information.



IGNORANCE IS NOT BLISS

It is important to remember that the consequences of not knowing what to do in a rescue situation are drastic. Decisions must be made quickly, and with knowledge. A person knowing his limitations is as important as knowing “lots of technical stuff.” There are rescue situations where it will be “over your head,” but with good, retainable training you can become educated to know your limitations. It is OK to realize that a rescue situation is too hazardous for you to attempt. Human nature and emotions will be insisting that you have to do something. The only way you can live with that decision is good retainable training.

Having the proper knowledge and equipment allows you to determine and make a successful rescue. Without the knowledge, you’ll be playing the odds—very likely with drastic consequences. Safety is education! *ip*

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Governor Schwarzenegger meets with employees of San Diego Gas & Electric after speaking at a dedication ceremony for the new transmission line that will provide San Diego an additional 400 Megawatts to meet their energy needs. This photo was submitted by John McRae of San Diego Gas & Electric.

