FORTHCOMING DROPPED OBJECTS STANDARD AWAITING FINAL APPROVAL

Over the past year, several leading safety equipment manufacturers have been working with the International Safety Equipment Association (ISEA) to develop a standard for equipment solutions that prevent dropped objects.

The American National Standard for Dropped Object Prevention Solutions (a working name), or ISEA Standard 121, has recently been approved by committee members and is now going through a formal review process. Once it has been finalized, released and adopted, it will give manufacturers a consistent guideline for classification, test procedure and performance requirements for this equipment. When this happens, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) will likely adopt the standard together with ISEA, making it ANSI/ISEA 121.

// WHY DO WE NEED A DROPPED OBJECTS STANDARD?

More and more workers are finding themselves ascending to heights in all industries, and along with them, the tools and equipment necessary to do the job. Struck-by falling objects incidents kill hundreds of individuals each year and injure tens of thousands more.

Safety at heights has evolved rapidly to prevent workers from falling from heights. However, the tools and equipment that go up with those workers have not been given the same emphasis. For decades, companies and regulators alike have operated as if the only line of defense was to cover people below with hard hats or canopies – or install expensive, time consuming systems like netting, barricades or toe-boards.

A hard hat can minimize the damage that occurs if an object falls and hits you in the head, but what if you’re bent over and it hits you in the back? Those are the questions manufacturers are now answering, innovating solutions designed to tie off equipment like we tie off the workers themselves. They’re also developing container solutions that allow workers to secure tools, small parts and other loads while working at heights. This equipment is known as dropped objects prevention.

// WHAT WILL THE NEW STANDARD ADDRESS?

» Establishing minimum design, performance/testing and labeling requirements for dropped object prevention solutions. For example, test factors for this equipment will be established requiring solutions to be dynamically and/or statically tested using a ratio beyond that of the solution’s stated capacity.
Focus on preventative solutions actively used by workers to mitigate these hazards and establish classification of these solutions. The initial standard will include four classes of solutions:

**ANCHOR ATTACHMENTS** – Retrofit attachment points installed onto fixed anchor locations like structure or a worker themselves to anchor tool tethers.

**TOOL ATTACHMENTS** – Retrofit attachment points installed onto tools and equipment, allowing them to be tethered.

**TOOL TETHERS** – Lanyards that connect tools to an anchor point.

**CONTAINERS** – Bags, buckets and pouches that are used to transport tools and equipment to and from at-heights work zones.

**WHAT WON’T THE NEW STANDARD ADDRESS?**

- Passive preventative solutions such as netting, barricades and toe boards.
- Personal protective solutions for dropped objects including head protection, foot protection and eye protection.
- Hoisting or lifting requirements for materials handling.
- Best practices for use of equipment in the field. For example, it will not tell workers what the weight limit is to tie off to the body nor will it tell them where on the harness they should connect a tool lanyard.

**WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ANSI, ISEA AND OSHA?**

Standard 121 is a voluntary standard, not a regulation directly enforced by OSHA. That’s an important distinction to make.

**ISEA** (International Safety Equipment Association) is a professional association for personal protective equipment and technologies that has served as the trade association of safety manufacturers for more than 75 years. Their members sponsor and draft standards that can then be adopted by organizations like ANSI.

**ANSI** (American National Standards Institute) is a nearly century-old, private, not-for-profit organization that promotes “voluntary consensus standards.” The purpose of ANSI and the standards they and ISEA put forth is to set a level of quality and safety across an entire industry. Because these standards are voluntary, there is no enforcement of them. However, many are recognized as industry best practice.
OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration), on the other hand, is a regulatory government body that sets and enforces standards for safe working conditions. The release of Standard 121 will provide employers with guidance on how to reduce dropped object risk, but will not legally require them to implement the equipment discussed in the standard.

Despite the differences between OSHA, ANSI and ISEA, and Standard 121 not directly being enforceable, there are two narratives in which OSHA could use an ISEA/ANSI standard to enforce:

» **OSHA’s General Duty Clause:** This clause allows OSHA to refer to other standards, like ANSI/ISEA, to cite employers for not “furnishing” their employees a “place of employment free from recognized hazards.” The “recognition” of those hazards comes in the form of reference to industry standards like ANSI/ISEA as a known best practice.

» **Interpretation:** It is a myth that OSHA does not say anything about duty to protect against falling objects. In both the General Industry Standard 1910 (Subpart D – Walking Working Surfaces) and the Construction Standard 1926 (Scaffolds 1926.451; Fall Protection 1926.501; Steel Erection 1926.759) OSHA refers to falling objects. With the Standard 121, there will be formalized documentation of better preventative measures that can be implemented beyond hard hats and toe-boards. Interpretation can lead to this equipment becoming preferred.

Time will tell how this standard and the bodies above will intertwine but the end result is a safer work zone that everyone can benefit from.

**// TIMING**

The release date of Standard 121 has not been finalized, but with a completed draft and entrance into the review process, the likelihood is the second quarter of 2018. That date may move out if major adjustments are necessary, but ISEA members are optimistic.

**// QUESTIONS**

For questions about the forthcoming Dropped Objects Standard 121 or how to design and implement a dropped objects program in your workplace, please call **800.225.8238** or email **support@ergodyne.com**.

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