

Topic Sheet No. 19

Working in poor light



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SAFETY AND HEALTH TOPIC SHEET NO. 19: WORKING IN POOR LIGHT

A safety and health 'topic sheet' aimed at raising awareness of hazards in the rope access industry. The series may be of use as a toolbox talk.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Because rope access work is carried out in such varied situations and conditions it is almost inevitable that some of it will be carried out where poor lighting conditions are present.
- 1.2 Poor lighting will not always be caused by night work, or by work carried out late in the day. Poor conditions may result from the site location and the conditions, e.g. working in an environment which is very dusty or heavily shaded in contrast to bright light.
- 1.3 Any poor lighting and poor visibility scenario may present a greater risk when carrying out tasks and manoeuvres; perhaps more so than rigging which is generally carried out in a fixed location and is thus easier to control.

2 WHAT CAN GO WRONG ...

- 2.1 Any task being carried out on the ropes will be made more difficult by trying to carry it out in poor lighting, or a dusty environment. Health and safety guidance¹ gives guidance for lighting conditions and the type of lighting required for different levels of difficulty involved in the task. However, there is no specific measure or guidance for poor visibility caused by environmental conditions.
- 2.2 Any external factors that will or could adversely affect visibility need to be individually risk assessed and controlled.
- 2.3 Remember, poor visibility affects not only technician safety but also the efficiency and quality of the work.

Case study

Technicians were carrying out basic cleaning works in a dark and dusty environment. During the task the technicians had to carry out a simple rope transfer.

Although the work site had adequate *task specific* lighting there was a stark contrast between light and shade throughout the structure, due to the limited locations in which lighting was positioned and its intensity.

This made the rope transfers more awkward for the technicians as they had to move around to find adequate lighting in order to check their connections.

The poor lighting and visibility increased the risk in a simple manoeuvre and decreased the efficiency of the task.

Source: Technician experience

¹ Lighting at work, <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/hsg38.pdf>

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3 WHY THINGS CAN GO WRONG ...

3.1 Things can go wrong as a result of:

- (a) inadequate lighting and poor visibility;
- (b) poor assessment of the lighting requirements;
- (c) complicated manoeuvres;
- (d) poor selection of equipment;
- (e) no emergency or contingency plan.

4 WHAT YOU CAN DO ...

4.1 You should:

- Assess every element of the task to be completed, including: rigging and de-rigging; the task itself; the location of any rope access manoeuvres, and ensure adequate and correct lighting for each aspect.
- Keep manoeuvres as simple as possible, particularly if the risk has already been increased by poor lighting and visibility; don't add to this.
- Select the right equipment in the right location. Task lighting can provide excellent lighting, but not in all locations.
 - Consider where technicians will be looking in order to carry out a task. Are they likely to be constantly dazzled by lighting. Personal lighting may be required or preferable.
- Assess whether the lighting conditions are adequate for a rescue situation. Ensure there is there a back-up plan in the event of lighting failure or power outage, e.g. head torches or personal lighting.

5 ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 Lighting and visibility requirements may change during a task. This may be as a result of the time of day, the weather conditions or other variables.

5.2 Plan for changing conditions.

6 ACTION

6.1 Review your management system's procedures for work in poor lighting and visibility.

7 REFERENCES

7.1 For a list of current (and past) 'safety communications' by IRATA, see www.irata.org

8 RECORD FORM

8.1 An example *Safety and Health Topic Sheet: Record Form* is given below. Members may have their own procedure(s) for recording briefings to technicians and others.

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9 FURTHER READING

Lighting at work, HSE (1997)²

Construction site health and safety – Visibility, ATC Risk Management³

² <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg38.htm>

³ <http://www.atcrisk.co.uk/articles/construction-site-health-and-safety-visibility.php>

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IRATA SAFETY AND HEALTH TOPIC SHEET – RECORD FORM			
Site:			
Date:			
Topic(s) for discussion:		Topic Sheet No. 19: Working in poor light	
Reason for talk:			
Start time:		Finish time:	
Attended by <i>Please sign to verify understanding of briefing</i>			
Print name:		Signature:	
<i>Continue overleaf (where necessary)</i>			
Matters raised by employees:		Action taken as a result:	
<i>Continue overleaf (where necessary)</i>			
Briefing leader <i>I confirm I have delivered this briefing and have questioned those attending on the topic discussed.</i>			
Print name:		Signature:	
			Date:
Comments:			