



Keys to a Successful Rope Access Program

A Successful Rope Access Program Will Require Several Crucial Steps in Order to Success and a Return on Investment

1.) Analysis – The start up costs to begin a rope access program can be quite significant, therefore it is important to do a thorough analysis of your situation to determine if it practical to implement a program. It is important to look at the scope of anticipated work. Is this an ongoing or recurring project that will require rope access continually? Are there other processes in your work environment which might benefit from utilizing rope access? If the actual anticipated work is relatively low or the recurrence infrequent, it may be a better practice to outsource the work. However, rope access is much like any other tool, upon acquisition; one soon discovers other uses for it other than that for which it was initially purchased/developed.

One must also look at the regulatory environment one finds oneself in and factor that in as well. Various state and federal agencies look at rope access in different views, which can have an effect on how your use of rope access is viewed. Cal-OSHA, for instance recognizes rope access as a viable means of access which aids in its acceptance for use. Does your environment allow for discussions about rope access with your local regulatory agencies? You will also have to get your companies risk analysis group and safety group on board as well.

One option to assist in the development of your analysis is to have an audit done of your current practices. Usually these are done by groups well versed in rope access that can show both the eventual cost savings of rope access as well as other options that may be better suited for your particular environment.

Some other thoughts for your program should be anticipated size of the program? Do you have the appropriate personnel to be able to certify in rope access? Is there a commitment by management to support the program, both fiscally and managerially?

2.) Training & Certification – If your program is just developing, one of your first steps will be to certify a group of workers in rope access. This can be done under either SPRAT or IRATA, depending on your locale. This can be done by either sending a smaller group to one of the numerous training sessions that go on throughout the country. Or, if you have adequate space and capability, you can host a training session. This is often more economically feasible if you have a group of five or more. For information on hosting a course, please either contact the SPRAT office or see the web page at www.sprat.org.

Under the SPRAT guidelines, training is not required to certify, however, it is strongly encouraged as the success rate is substantially higher. If your group has been utilizing a two rope version of industrial rope access, and you have individuals who can show either 500 (for Level II) or 1000 (for Level III) hours of working on rope, you may be able to have them do direct entry into those respective levels. In both of these cases it is strongly advised to have someone go through a training session. This will help the candidates to understand what is required as well as give them the necessary skills to succeed.

Assuming that you are starting from ground zero, most likely after certification, you will have a group of Level I's. The main difficulty at this point is one of supervision. Under the Safe Practices, Level I's must be working under the direct supervision of either a Level II or Level III. If your program doesn't have these on hand, one can look at outsourcing that skill base from a variety of different groups.

After completing your training, you should now have a group of individuals who are now ready to accomplish the required tasks at hand

3.) Equipment – The next step in the development process is to equip and outfit your group for the tasks at hand. This step – depending on how you do your training – may actually begin prior to a training session or it may happen concurrently with your training session. There are two general categories of gear that will need to be provided – gear for the individual and gear available for group use. Each technician will require a minimum amount of gear which includes a multipoint harness, lanyards, ascenders, descenders and some general work gear such as carabiners, sheaves and slings.

Group equipment includes rescue kits which have a minimum amount of gear and spare equipment necessary to effect a rescue or replace a piece of gear in an emergency.

The number of kits, harnesses, and rescue kits varies depending on your maximum number of workers working at any given time. For example, you may have a total of 10 people certified at various levels in your program; however the maximum number that will work at any given time will only be six. Therefore, you would only need 6 harnesses and kits. With perhaps a spare or two of each in case of damage.

Since each job will require a rescue kit, The number of rescue kits needed will depend on the total number of jobs you have going on at any given time and the distance they are separated from each other. So if the maximum number of jobs you have going on at the same time that are geographically isolated is three you will need at least three kits. If the jobs are occurring in relatively close proximity, than the can perhaps share a rescue kit.

All gear will need to be inspected and tracked based on both manufacturer's recommendations, company policy, and local regulatory policy.

Group gear will include ropes, anchorages – beam clamps, anchor straps, etc., specialized gear that might be necessary for the job at hand (artificial high points, etc), patient packaging and any gear necessary for each particular job.

Specifications for specific gear can be found in the SPRAT safe practices document.

4.) Commitment and Management of the Program – There is a strong need to ensure that there is a commitment by all parties to maintain both either the SPRAT Safe Practices or your companies Policies and Procedures regarding Rope Access. A rope access program can be a fairly large investment in both time and personnel; however without a strong commitment from all parties, the program cannot succeed and thrive.

Key roles that will need to be filled include Rope Access Supervisors, a Rope Access Program Manager, and Equipment Inspectors.

Rope Access Supervisors, usually a Level 3 Certified Technician(s), will be the front line for safety. They will be implementing your company policies and ensuring the safety of the jobsite. It is helpful for these folks to have completed an OSHA Competent Persons course in Fall Protection. This gives them the tools to argue effectively should a regulatory agency arrive on site. These positions will be working with your Program Manager to ensure the Policies and Procedures are appropriate and that the work being done maintains those standards

The Rope Access Program Manager is responsible for developing, maintaining, and implementing the company's policies and procedures as they pertain to Rope Access. Usually, they will have some involvement with your Safety/Risk Analysis group. These policies can be a direct adoption of the SPRAT Safe Practices document or they can be written specifically for your line of business.

Equipment Inspectors will be necessary to inspect and track all gear that is utilized in Rope Access. This covers the Frequent and Periodic Inspections required by most regulatory agencies. Most inspection protocols are set up to follow those used in Fall Protection so this position may require some general training in regards to inspection procedures.

In conclusion, this is but a brief overview of how to begin a rope access program. The intent of this document is to bring up some basic discussion points and brief guidelines to begin developing a Rope Access Program from the ground up. It is not intended as an in depth, step by step guideline for your program. It is imperative that find a group that can guide and mentor you towards the completion of the intended goal of having a functioning rope access program.

About SPRAT

The Society of Professional Rope Access Technicians (SPRAT) based in the United States, is dedicated to promoting the safe development of industrial rope access standards worldwide.

SPRAT supports companies and technicians using rope access with certification programs, regulatory support, networking, and opportunities to participate in developing industry-consensus standards.

Membership in the organization is open to any company or individual that uses rope access. Current members include a broad cross-section of commercial industry, professional services, and government agencies.

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