

SAFE POLE CLIMBING PRACTICES

The purpose of this Safety Standard is to instruct in the proper use and care of pole climbing equipment. Pole climbing can be hazardous or safe, but the hazards can be reduced by heeding basic precautions.

Pole attachments must be avoided whenever possible to avoid being thrown off balance. Attention to the pole surface will prevent placing a gaff in unsound wood, in a defect or against a metallic object. Attentive and skilled use of equipment will prevent most accidents and resultant injuries.

The body belt and safety strap, when properly used, provide for security and full use of the hands when in a working position. The three safety practices that should be made a habit are:

1. Be sure the safety snaps are in both D-rings with keepers turned out.
2. Always use the safety strap, even when the working position seems otherwise secure.
3. Make certain that a safety strap cannot slip over the top of the pole.

Daily use of these three precautions can prevent serious accidents.

Beginning

Before climbing, the beginner should practice strapping off on the ground. Climbing may be practiced on the first two or three feet of the pole. Practice ascending and descending, strapping off and unstrapping before you climb to any height.

Climbing

Protect hands and arms by wearing gloves and long sleeve shirts when climbing or descending poles. Ascend a pole by climbing without haste and with confidence in good climbing equipment.

1. Before climbing, inspect the pole for unsafe conditions, such as cracks, nails, attachments, rot, or loose pole steps. Inspect the pole visually when ascending or descending to avoid hazardous spots.
2. The length of each step should be approximately eight (8) inches. The angle between the climbing iron and the pole should be approximately 30 degrees.
3. Keep hips, knees and shoulders a comfortable distance away from the pole. Check to see if the gaffs are being placed in sound wood.
4. The weight of one's body will usually be sufficient to force the gaff into the pole. However, on hardwood poles it may be necessary to use additional force by jabbing the gaff sharply into the pole. The hand, on the side of the body on which the leg is up, is raised with or slightly before, the foot.
5. Shift weight gradually from one leg to the other before removing a gaff from the pole. The horizontal distance between gaff positions across the pole should be approximately four (4) to six (6) inches, depending on the size of the pole.
6. In descending a pole, the same basics apply. Take short steps, keep the knees, hips and shoulders away from the pole. Keep a 30-degree angle between the shank of the climber and the pole and keep the gaffs and hands in the correct position.

To disengage a gaff embedded too deeply in a pole, press the sole of the boot against the pole. This action provides sufficient leverage to raise the gaff from the pole. Don't break the gaff from the pole by allowing the knee to fall away from the pole. This damages a pole that you or one of your fellow workers may have to climb again.

Strapping Off

The proper method in making the safety strap ready to use is simple and should become a habit. The following practices are recommended:

1. Set gaffs with both feet on the same level, hold on to the pole with the right hand, and reach for the strap with the left hand.
2. Check to see that the other end of the strap is engaged in the D-ring. With the left hand, unfasten the snap hook on the single end of the strap from the D-ring.
3. Pass the strap around the pole until it can be reached by the right hand.
4. Hold on to the pole with the left hand, making sure that the strap is flat against the pole, not twisted; carry the strap to the D-ring.
5. Fasten the snap hook to the right D-ring with the keeper facing out.
6. A click heard when fastening the snap hook to the D-ring does not mean the connection is securely made. Check, the connection visually before you put your weight on the belt.
7. The body may now be moved back, supported by the strap. Hold the right side of the safety strap with the right hand when leaning back as an additional precaution, before removing the left hand from the pole.

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