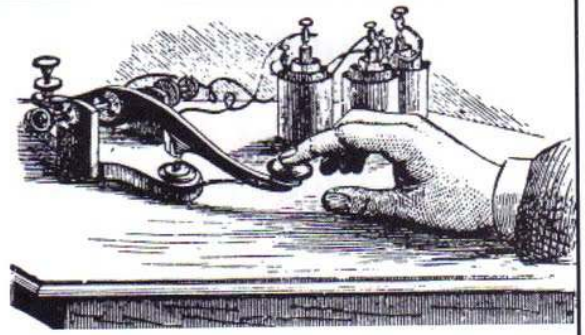


NOTICE TO KEEPERS



An Alternative to Scaffolding

Rope access is a way to access and position a single person on the exterior or even interior of a structure using ropes and specialized hardware. It permits access without bulky scaffolding or swing staging that can block entrances and create hazards to pedestrians. Rope access workers scale buildings and structures using techniques and gear similar to that of rock or mountain climbers. The technique employed consists of two ropes: one work line and one safety or backup line, both tied to separate anchors. A plethora of gadgetry to ascend and descend the working line is also used. Each descent is called “a drop,” and in each drop a worker can either descend or ascend the line depending on where the work needs to be completed. Although the rope may hang from a structure in a straight

line, a competent rope access technician can position himself almost anywhere within 20 feet or more of that straight line. Rope technicians have many tricks up their sleeves and would use other ropes and anchors to do this extreme positioning. This positioning and ascent system is where time and money can be saved on any given project. A technician can rappel onto a structure and paint a 20 x 100 foot section before lunch time. In essence a rope access team can set up, do the work, and dismantle the gear before the scaffolding is erected or even brought onto the job site.

Rope access techniques are not entirely new. At the turn of the 20th century, steeplejacks would descend a single line while sitting in a bosun’s chair to repair the bell towers of old churches. Once they set up their ropes they would build scaffolds around the bell towers by fixing anchors to the walls. The ropes would then be pushed aside and a full scaffold

crew would begin work. It is in the best interest of a rope access worker to eliminate the potential for falls, and this is where standards come into the equation. Today’s standards are implemented from two governing bodies, the Society of Professional Rope Access Technicians (SPRAT) & and the Industrial Rope Access Trade Association (IRATA). IRATA is the international standard which governs Europe and Asia. SPRAT is the regulating association that governs the USA. These associations set similar standards and certify workers and trainers to work on a rope safely, efficiently, and effectively. Today’s version of rope access is fairly safe because it is used as a “positioning system” and not a fall arrest system. If one of a worker’s lines happens to fail, the other line would catch him. A worker’s fall would be measured in inches instead of feet.

Rope access attracts people from all occupations to its field, and these people bring with them some high-tech knowledge. Most companies that specialize in rope access do not offer just one service. It would not be unusual for a rope access company to complete a painting project on a building one day and blade reconstruction on a wind turbine the next. Companies put emphasis not only in rope access skills but the trade skills as well. They routinely can supply workers such as painters, welders, and inspectors who are trained and competent in such trades. Travel is a fundamental part of any rope access employee and company. Although time and money can be saved using rope access, the best benefit is non-invasiveness. When crews are at work, usually no one notices them and has no idea that repair work is being completed. There is no part of a maintenance plan that cannot utilize the great benefits from rope access, whether a lighthouse is 50 feet or over 300 feet tall. Rope access is a cost effective, less intrusive, way to repair your lighthouse.



A worker dangles above the city skyline while working on decorative roof brackets. Photo courtesy of Rich Purnell of the BASE Group.