IRATA SAFETY BULLETIN SB 32
STRAIN INJURIES

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1. Summary of incident reports

A few incidents have been reported to IRATA relating to technicians suffering strain injuries;

"While bristle blasting the underside of the pipework, the technician felt a pulling sensation in their left shoulder when applying pressure. Technician came down and reported to medic."

No rescue required.

"Technician was climbing after lunch, between pipes and experienced pain in his shoulder. He was safe and sitting on pipes and alerted his team mates. A rescue was initiated where the supervisor climbed to him, prior to attaching a 3:1 system to the technician and hauling him to safety. The technician was stripped of his harness and walked away escorted to the medic."

The shoulder was found to be dislocated causing significant pain.

"While performing rigging work, technician felt pain in his groin after repositioning and evacuated to surface. After resting, the pain was still present so technician reported to rig medic who evacuated him to hospital for inspection/diagnosis. Technician had passed a full medical examination and had been working without problems since then."

No rescue was required.

All the scenarios above describe qualified rope access technicians who had passed medicals to work in the environment they were operating in, however these medicals do not take into account their current physical strength and fitness as they are usually carried out on a two yearly cycle.

2. Conclusions

According to the IRATA ICOP, rope access technicians should be physically fit to carry out rope access activities at height.

*"**1.4.2.2 Training and competence***

Rope access technicians should be:

b) sufficiently physically fit and free from any disability that might prevent them from working safely at height;"

The trigger mechanism for these incidents appears to be related to poor body positioning, overexertion or lack of access and egress consideration.

3. Recommendations

- Rope access work can be strenuous and it is strongly recommended to carry out suitable warm up exercises prior to commencing any rope access activities, especially after prolonged periods of rest.
- Use rope access equipment for its intended purpose and ensure the most ergonomic body position in relation to the task and worksite.
- If any discomfort is being experienced, whilst carrying out the task, stop the job and reposition prior to commencing the task. If the task cannot be carried out safely it should not be carried out at all.
- Technicians should take the time to be mindful of their comfort whilst fitting their appropriately sized rope access harness as per the manufacturer's instructions and use suitable clothing to maintain a comfortable temperature while working.

***"2.3.1.6** Rope access technicians should be given the opportunity not to work at height if they do not feel fit enough to do so. (IRATA ICOP)".*

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