

# NASA-LaRC SAFETY NEWSLETTER

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## Facility Safety Head and Facility Coordinators Meeting

On October 14 there was an "all hands" meeting of Facility Safety Heads (FSH) and Facility Coordinators (FC) at the Reid Conference. There was approximately 38% attendance of the FSHs and FCs at this meeting. To help the 62% of those who missed this meeting, the Office of Safety and Facility Assurance (OSFA) had the meeting video taped and copies made of the view graphs. This important meeting needs to be viewed by all FSHs and FCs! The OSFA will be rescheduling this important meeting and sending out advance notices.

## New Mandates for Fall Protection

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) final rule on fall protection in the construction industry takes effect February 6, 1995. The new rule will provide safer protection from falls, the leading cause of fatalities in the construction industry. Among the changes that become effective in the construction industry are:

- Sets the uniform threshold height of 6 feet for providing fall protection.
- Prohibits the use of body belts as part of a personal fall arrest system as of January 1, 1998.
- Contains sample fall protection plans with elements that must be addressed in every contractor's plan.
- Gives employers flexibility to choose from a variety of fall protection systems, including guardrails with toeboards, safety net systems, or personal fall arrest systems.
- Requires employers to designate a competent person to monitor the safety of employees.

## NIOSH Challenges Back Belt Use

The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health recently finished reviewing various world-wide studies of the effectiveness of back belts. After analyzing 21 existing peer-reviewed biomechanical, physiological, psychophysical, and epidemiological studies, the working group concluded that there are insufficient data to show that typical industrial-type back belts can protect workers from the hazards of repeated lifting, pushing, pulling, twisting, or bending. The panelists also warned that prolonged back belt use could have adverse effects on muscle tone and cardiovascular health and that some workers may believe back belts allow them to lift more than they would otherwise, which would put them at greater risk than not wearing a back belt. NIOSH believes that employers should rely on comprehensive ergonomics programs that include job and workplace assessment and redesign, training, surveillance, and medical management components.

NIOSH did not address whether back supports can be beneficial to workers recovering from injury or for return to work. Other experts, however, including the American Industrial Hygiene Association's ergonomics committee, have indicated that they can be useful as part of a medical protocol for rehabilitation.

At LaRC, the Office of Safety and Facility assurance **does not** recommend the use of back belts among uninjured workers, and **does not** consider back belts to be personal protective equipment.