

**Scott Fowler**

Hello everyone and welcome to the Case for Safety podcast. I'm your host Scott Fowler. Appreciate you being with us today where we're going to be delving into the world of fall protection and working at height. Always a lot to talk about with that topic and uh my guest today is someone who knows an awful lot about that is Kevin Denis.

Kevin is principal and owner of Work-at-Height. He's vice chair of the ANSI/ASSP Z359 committee for fall protection and fall restraint and lead of our standards-based user group on fall protection. Kevin, great to have you back on the show.

**Kevin Denis**

Good to be talking to you again. Yeah, thanks, Scott. Thank you for the opportunity to present and talk about fall protection to your user group. It's always a pleasure working with the ASSP.

**Scott Fowler**

Always a pleasure talking to you. And as we get started, I thought we could just kind of take a look at where the industry is right now. As I say, you're someone who's deeply involved with fall protection and work at height. So, when you think about the current state of fall protection, challenges that might exist, opportunities in the industry, what comes to mind for you?

**Kevin Denis**

Yeah, sure. So, a status of the industry update, if you will. I'll kind of answer this in two parts. On one hand, we're doing really, really well. Occupational health and safety regulations are in place, both federally and with state organization. The Z359 standards are very robust, very mature. There's more safety professionals that understand fall protection available to people than ever before.

So, the technology is there, the people are in place, the work practices have improved, the amount of equipment that people have available is unprecedented nowadays. And there's very, very few jobs where fall protection cannot be applied anymore. So, on one hand, we're doing really, really well. Yet on the other hand, uh fatalities due to falls continue to occur.

You take a look at the BLS statistics, and we really haven't seen a significant change or reduction of fall-related fatalities. It's stayed pretty stagnant for decades. So, on one hand, we're doing really, really well. And on the other hand, there's still a lot more work to do.

**Scott Fowler**

Sure. Now, thinking about that, you talk about how there's more information out there. We've got these really robust standards, but at the same time, we're experiencing fatalities out there in the field. What are those gaps that you feel like exist? And how can we bridge those with all this information that's out there?

**Kevin Denis**

Yeah, yeah, got it. Well, I believe, and this is just my opinion, that it's the human behavior is why we haven't seen the decrease in the fatalities. When you look at these hundreds and hundreds of fall-related accidents, the overwhelming, consistent theme amongst all of them is somebody is up at height with nothing. Guardrails aren't in place, there isn't a harness system in place, travel restraint, fall arrest. Somebody was working up at heights with nothing. So, the vast majority of these fatalities occur when no fall protection is in place.

Regardless of all of those things I mentioned earlier, regardless of the laws, regardless of the standards, and I believe it is just people have yet to see the value in fall protection. And what I mean by that, it's not the value that people think I'm talking about. Like, if somebody's up at height, they have a harness on, they fall, the system works, incredible value there.

The value I'm talking about is the daily barriers to using fall protection that affects all of us. Whenever we have a job up at height, we know what to do to protect ourselves and we know the risk. We could fall and we could injure ourselves, but there's all of these little barriers start to creep in. What are the odds of me falling this time? Pretty low. I've done the job a lot before without fall protection successfully.

It's going to take me extra time to put on that harness or to apply fall protection or to install a guardrail. I don't have the resources. I haven't got the money or the time or the people to apply fall protection. One of the greatest barriers, believe it or not, of people that I talk to is they go, I want to be a good employee. I want to get that job done. I'm safety conscious. I'm careful of what I do. It's worth the risk for me to get that job done.

So that's the value I'm talking about. There's all of these little daily barriers that start to creep in. And ultimately, a decision is made that it's worth the risk. So that's the greatest challenge to people applying fall protection is getting through those barriers. And they don't relate to regulations or equipment or work practices. It's a cultural or a behavioral issue.

And it's not just with the employee who's exposed or doing the work. I see those same challenges of time and money and resources at the supervisor level, at the middle

management level, and even in some cases, the owners of companies go, you know what, it's probably not going to happen.

The odds are in our favor. Let's just do the job without it. So, if an organization can get through those barriers, the rest of it is kind of easy. So that's what I believe is why we continue to see these accidents and these numbers is because of the culture and how we perceive fall protection.

**Scott Fowler**

Sure, I mean, time and money and resources, I mean, that could be more of a challenge depending on the size of the organization. But when you think about the safety professional's role and how supervisors, whoever it might be, and how they can overcome some of those barriers, uh what advice would you give to them?

**Kevin Denis**

Oh, well, it's just like anything, you know, uh how did somebody mature enough to where they wanted to wear the seatbelt all the time or the hard hat or the steel toed boots. uh Fall protection just has to mature within every organization to where we train people that the company doesn't expect you to take unnecessary risks.

It's okay. And free up the time and people and money and resources to apply fall protection. And we're seeing, and don't get me wrong, we see that in thousands and thousands of organizations already. But the theme when you find that bad accident, it's usually one of those behaviors that prevented fall protection from being applied.

**Scott Fowler**

Let's talk a little bit more about that. I know recently at Safety 2026, you gave a presentation on human factors in fall protection. With Z359 and things like that, there's a lot of focus on the technical. This was more focused on the human factor. So, you touched on a little bit earlier, but I if we could talk a little bit more about the role of human, excuse me, the role of human factors in working at height and how we can go about addressing those.

**Kevin Denis**

Yeah, sure. Well, it's kind of a repeat of the last answer I just gave. What I believe is the human variable, the human factors, the behavior, the culture. uh You know, I think of myself outside of work, you know, just cleaning gutters on my house and, you know, trimming trees after a storm. You know, I know what to do, but I also have those exact same variables like, hey, you gotta go get your equipment, you gotta take the time, you gotta make the effort to protect yourself. The chances are, of me falling off the roof of my house are very, very low.

And you to step back and go, no, there is value in this for me. I do want to protect myself. I will take the time. And it's those barriers that, again, usually prevent fall protection from being applied or all of these little daily barriers that we have.

**Scott Fowler**

Do you feel like it's a perception in some cases that, you know, the equipment, whatever it might be, gets in the way of productivity. Like, okay, we're just gonna try to get this done as quick as possible. if, you know, adding all these other elements is gonna slow us down.

**Kevin Denis**

Yeah, yeah, well, there you go. You just mentioned it, it's time. Right. We can't argue with anybody that wearing a harness isn't an addition. You know, yeah, it adds a, I certainly wouldn't say it adds a layer of complexity.

But it certainly adds a layer. A person has to wear something, they have to find an anchor, they have to be tied off. And it kind of devalues fall protection because the person goes, oh my gosh, is this really worth it? So that's exactly one of the main problems.

And all the greater arguments are all the reasons why hopefully we should be designing buildings with guardrails and walkways and platforms and eliminate or try to reduce as much as possible the use of harness-based systems because do require the user to be incredibly involved with it.

They have to wear it correctly you have to be tethered off to something you have to find an anchor you have to worry about clearance you have to develop a rescue plan you know as if you can use passive systems and then it eliminates all of that. So, it's a maturing, you know, over time we will get there and we are getting there. But it's gonna take a lot more effort than where we're at right now.

**Scott Fowler**

Sure. And to your point just there, you have training involved in, you know, understanding the equipment, you know, knowing how to tie off and all those other things that could be another perceived barrier in an organization's mind, like we're gonna have to train our team on how to use all these things, you know, as opposed to just letting them do their thing and getting the job done as quickly as possible.

**Kevin Denis**

Right, right. since there's a lot of harness-based systems out there, know, like, gosh, there's over 20,000 pieces of fall protection equipment available to an employer. And many times, an organization, unfortunately, will default and start with a harness-based system, whether

it's restraint or arrest, because they look at guard rails and go, boy, that's \$150 a linear foot. That's a huge capital cost. Yet I can get a harness-based system with harness, line your tether anchor for \$800, \$900. So many times, it's a hidden cost or a hidden issue.

You don't realize the, it's significantly less on the capital side, but now you have training uh costs associated with it. You have to develop a rescue plan. You have to store that equipment. You have to inspect that equipment. You have to replace that equipment when it wears out. So many times, you know, defaulting to a harness-based system isn't the best option, although it might be less on the financial side up front. Whereas guardrails or nets or other passive methods of control are a better choice.

### **Scott Fowler**

Talking about those different methods, let's shift into Z359 now. As I mentioned, you're the vice chair of the ANSI/ASSP Z359 committee, which develops all these really robust standards around a lot of different elements of fall protection, how to develop an effective system. Wonder if we could talk a little bit about that. Just kind of give folks an overview of the 359 standards and how they can help them improve conditions for workers at height.

### **Kevin Denis**

Yeah, yeah, I got you. Boy, I could go on for hours and days about the standards. There's a lot of them. That's probably one of the comments that we get is they're difficult to keep up with because the standards are so voluminous. But they are a great resource.

If you are a fall protection professional, the Z359 standards provide a considerable amount of information and valuable guidance. uh If it's an equipment standard, you know, for harnesses, SRDs, lifelines, fall arresters, you can see how the equipment is tested. And understanding how it's tested, that enables a person to kind of apply how it'll perform in the field. You know, and that's valuable.

You know, knowing how a piece of equipment is expected to perform if a fall occurs. And I always have to give a shout out to Z359.2, which is uh the employer standard, if you will. It's not an equipment standard. It offers direction for employers to uh develop and implement and to manage a fall protection program.

And it details uh surveys, hazard assessments, the roles of people; authorized, competent, qualified trainers, rescuers, and the training requirements of said people, inspections, and general guidance how to establish a fall protection program. So again, if you're a fall protection professional, the Z359 family of standards are an incredibly valuable resource.

### **Scott Fowler**

So, I was just thinking about, thinking about, know, say you're a small construction company out there. Small to mid-size, I don't know what I don't know. When you think about that, particularly with the context of the Z359 standards, and they run the gamut covering so many different things. For somebody out there who's thinking, I've got folks working at height, but I don't really know where to start or how to develop an effective fall protection system, what advice would you give them?

**Kevin Denis**

Yeah, well, Z359.2 is where you start. It's kind of the genesis of it. There's so much information available between equipment manufacturers, organizations like the ASSP. uh You know, even online, there's fantastic resources available to somebody. So, there isn't really much of an excuse as to, you know, how do I start or what do I need to do?

Usually, the issue that the smaller organizations have is just a lack of expertise. They're very good at the work that they do but fall protection is just kind of an outlier and there's so much equipment out there that it can confuse people. But Z359.2 is where to start to identify all your fall hazards, develop a control method, and very quickly organizations will understand what they need to do. Starting with Z359.2 and then applying the equipment standards that are that are provided as well.

**Scott Fowler**

And yeah, I mean to your point there like once they take a look at the .2 They can kind of get an idea of what other standards they might need based on the work they're gonna be doing.

**Kevin Denis**

Yeah, if one of the very first things that the z 359 point two asks an employer to do is to survey the fall hazards and once an organization understands the fall hazards, the frequency of exposure, the duration, the passive travel of the worker, the solutions kind of present themselves. So that survey, that initial assessment kind of lays out the roadmap as to what they need to do.

**Scott Fowler**

Sure. I just want to add here, having been to a number of Z359 committee meetings myself, as you know, have fall protection professionals, engineers, manufacturers, you've got folks from across the industry coming together to help bring the best products to market and the best knowledge to those who need it to make sure workers can stay safe when they're up at height.

Something I mentioned at the top is that in addition to your work with the 359 committee, you are also the lead on our fall protection standards-based user group, which is something we launched back a few months ago focusing on fall protection, controlling hazardous energy and another one focused on AI. So, I wonder if you could just kind of talk a little bit about what this standards-based user group is, its goal and how things are going so far.

### **Kevin Denis**

Yeah. Yeah. Well, like you say, it's a new initiative. It's very young. So, it's just kind of started. But one of the comments that we always hear at the Z359 table as well as at the ASSP is, "great, we've purchased a standard, we've read the standard, it makes sense, but now what do I do with it?" How do I actually apply it into the field? And that's where the standards-based user group was kind of born, if you will. It's exactly like it stands, sounds, it's a group, and it's a user group based upon those standards.

So, it's a community, if you will, whose main purpose is to share information, success stories, failures, ask questions, act as a resource. um One of the things you often hear is it's a closed loop. So, we want to, here's the standard, here's how it was applied, here was the success, and then we feed that information back into the standards and change the standard as applicable.

So, it's the idea of continuous improvement. So, if the people that are watching this podcast, if you're a safety professional, even if you're not a safety professional, but you're involved in fall protection, the standards-based user group is a valuable group. uh Again, information sharing, technical expertise, uh and it should focus around how do we improve the state of fall protection for those people in the field and obviously connect it into how the standard works to do that.

### **Scott Fowler**

Sure. it seems to me, I mean, having this conversation with you and with the other leads of the S bugs, that this is really kind of trying to get at another barrier in one way. As you're talking about barriers earlier that, you know, as you noted, yet somebody gets a center. OK, what do I do now? So, this is this is really where, you know, the SBUGs are going to come in and say, OK this is the next step. This is what you know, this is what you do, what you don't do. And getting those kind of case studies to say these are people who have used the standard, this is what they've learned so then they can help others.

### **Kevin Denis**

Yeah, absolutely. You know, like anchoring within fall protection, identifying and using anchors are always a challenge. So ideally, you have a certified anchor every time you turn around, but there's a lot of people that don't own the structure.

You know, imagine a mechanical contract or an HVAC repair person, they're hopping on roofs of houses and buildings, they don't have the resources, or I shouldn't say it's not that they don't have the resources, they don't have the ability to modify that structure to put in an engineered anchor. So how can the standards help with that? There's a section inside of uh Z359.2 that talks about non-certified anchors, and then it also connects that, how do you train the staff that are selecting those anchors?

It's little things like that the SBUGs can help out with. um There's many, many people that have already gone through this process in regards to fall protection, me included, that can offer a lot of expertise, direction, or connection to that standard to help the people out in the field.

**Scott Fowler**

Yeah, and just want to add here if folks are interested in learning more or participating. can visit [ASSP.org/SBUGs](https://assp.org/SBUGs). And Kevin, I will give you the last word.

**Kevin Denis**

Well, thanks again. I always enjoy putting the information out there. Like you said, I am the subject matter expert for the fall protection standards-based user group. So, I hope there's some nugget of information in this podcast that people go, oh, that makes sense. Reach out to the ASSP if you're interested in either getting a standard or joining the SBUG community. So, I appreciate the time, Scott.

**Scott Fowler**

Always appreciate you taking the time, Kevin. It's always great to talk to you. As I mentioned, there's always things to talk about with fall protection for what you mentioned at the top. So really appreciate you taking the time to talk about how folks can improve their fall protection system. So thank you so much again.

**Kevin Denis**

Great. I appreciate it.

**Scott Fowler**

Thank you for tuning in. Be sure to like and subscribe, and we'll see you back here in two weeks.