



HOW TO CLEAN, DISINFECT, AND MAINTAIN YOUR FALL PROTECTION EQUIPMENT

During times like this, we wanted to walk you through everything you need to know when it comes to cleaning and disinfecting your fall protection equipment.

In light of current Coronavirus events, we have been getting several inquiries about how to clean and disinfect personal protective equipment (PPE). Washing your hands for 20 seconds and running a disinfectant wipe over a hard surface are great guidelines from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), however, those means are very limited in washing your own fall protection equipment. To better understand how to clean and disinfect your climbing equipment, it is best to understand what it is we are trying to accomplish.

According to the CDC there is a difference between just cleaning and disinfecting your equipment. By their definition;

Cleaning refers to the removal of germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces. It does not kill germs, but by removing them, it lowers their numbers and the risk of spreading infection. Disinfecting refers to using chemicals, for example, EPA-registered disinfectants, to kill germs on surfaces. This process does not necessarily clean dirty surfaces or remove germs, but by killing germs on a surface after cleaning, it can further lower the risk of spreading infection. When it comes to handling our materials, there are three main categories to fit your inspections into; soft goods, hard goods, and mechanical goods. Soft goods are any woven material such as webbing, rope, stitching, etc. Hard goods, including your d-rings and connectors, are typically made of steel or aluminum. The last category is mechanical components which include the moving components in carabiners, snap hooks and many descent and fall arrest or positioning devices

DO NOT SHARE YOUR PERSONAL PROTECTION EQUIPMENT

Soft Goods

Cleaning a harness, energy absorbing lanyard, tree saddle or secondary lanyard is not a difficult thing to do. Generally, it is recommended that you use a mild soap (such as Dawn® Dish Washing soap with a tub of warm water (less than 90° F) to remove dirt and odors. It is also suggested to use a nylon bristle brush or toothbrush to remove grease and oils from the fibers.

But what about any potential for pathogens or particles that could be carrying a disease? Buckingham recommends using a few drops of Dawn® dish/hand antibacterial soap in a large tub of warm water. Submerge PPE in the tub, then immediately rinse it in another tub full of clean warm water. Once thoroughly rinsed, allow to air dry away from heat or direct sunlight.

When drying any soft good, it is important that you hang your PPE in a place where it is not exposed to heat, like the sun. Hanging on a rack for a day or two can expedite the drying process.

Hard Goods

Hard goods are significantly easier to disinfect than soft goods because they can be treated with basic cleaning supplies that would normally break down soft good fibers. However, it is best to give them a thorough cleaning.

To clean items like carabiners, snaphooks, buckles, or d-rings it is best to place them in a bath of warm water and mild soap similar to the process of cleaning soft goods. While a soft good can sit in the bath for a short period of time, it is best to not leave hard goods submerged for too long to avoid corrosion. For drying hard goods, wipe with a clean cloth or use low pressure compressed air. When drying carabiners, snaphooks, or buckles please be aware of the additional maintenance steps described below in Mechanical Goods.

For disinfecting hard goods, simply wiping down with Lysol®, Clorox (or similar) Disinfecting Wipe should free it from any viral bacteria or pathogens. It is important to make sure you follow the instructions of the disinfectant manufacturer and let the solution dry on the surface for the recommended timeframe.

Caution! When disinfecting your PPE, be mindful of using more concentrated cleaning wipes near nylon webbing. Contact with webbing could cause deterioration of woven fibers.

Mechanical Goods

Though there is no difference in cleaning and disinfecting the mechanical goods from hard goods, as they both consist of aluminum or steel components. However, the attention to detail in the cleaning process is significantly more important.

After cleaning carabiners, snaphooks and buckles, it is best to make sure the components dry fast to prevent rusting to the springs and pawls of the device. We recommend using low pressure compressed air to dry the inside of the mechanism. Leaving it to air dry risks the potential of water remaining trapped and rusting.

Once the device has been cleaned, disinfected, and dried it is best to apply a small amount of lubricant to all mechanical components such as springs and pawls. We recommend BuckLube™, WD-40® or Hilco Lube. Wipe excess lube with a clean, dry cloth.

Storage

Once your PPE has been cleaned, disinfected, thoroughly dried and lubricated, we recommend it be stored in a Buckingham equipment bag out of the weather and away from corrosive elements.

In Summary

If you feel that your PPE has come into contact with a pathogen or harmful virus, like COVID-19, it is best to give it a good cleaning and proper disinfecting. While disinfecting a handful of times is not likely to cause significant harm to your equipment, sometimes the best option is to invest in new gear. While this can be costly, it prevents the unexpected chance you will degrade the material and risk injury or death.

For more information about best hygiene habits, please refer back to the CDC guidelines and help flatten the curve for company and community or contact Buckingham MFG to learn more.