



Subject: **Disinfecting Fall Protection Equipment  
- COVID-19 Concerns**

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**Description**

With the COVID-19 situation rapidly evolving, 3M has received numerous inquiries regarding disinfecting processes for fall protection equipment. As these processes have not had the opportunity to be fully tested and validated on our products, we have prepared this FAQ to help provide you guidance.

**Q: Is it a good practice to share personal protective equipment such as a full body safety harness with other employees?**

A: As a best practice, it is recommended that each employee be provided their own set of personal protective equipment.

**Q: Can the COVID-19 virus spread from contact with contaminated surfaces or objects?**

A: According to the World Health Organization (WHO), people can catch COVID-19 from others who have the virus. The disease can spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth which are spread when a person with COVID-19 coughs or exhales. These droplets land on objects and surfaces around the person. Other people then catch COVID-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. People can also catch COVID-19 if they breathe in droplets from a person with COVID-19 who coughs out or exhales droplets. Studies suggest that coronaviruses (including preliminary information on the COVID-19 virus) may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days. This may vary under different conditions (e.g. type of surface, temperature or humidity of the environment).

We are not aware of any studies available to specifically indicate how long the virus may be detected on personal protective equipment including fall protection. General information is available at:

<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

**Q: Can I clean my fall protection safety harness with over the counter disinfectants?**

A: At 3M, we fully understand users are seeking quick methods of disinfection solutions such as spray or wipe-on types of disinfectants for their PPE. However, 3M is unaware of any disinfectant that has been scientifically proven to both safely disinfect and not degrade the porous synthetic materials often used to manufacture safety harness web straps and shock absorbing lanyards.

At this time, it is not recommended to utilize any disinfectants on 3M Fall safety harness as the effects of these chemicals has not been evaluated by 3M on the actual products. Many webbing and stitching elements when exposed to chemicals found in many disinfectants may degrade and ultimately affect the product's original design and strength requirements.

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**Q: I have heard some 3M competitors advise and instructing users of fall protection PPE to disinfect their equipment with specific chemicals and cleaning agents?**

A: 3M has identified consumer resources and competitive communications that advise and instruct users of fall protection PPE to disinfect their equipment with specific chemicals and cleaning agents. During review of these recommended agents, 3M has identified in the disinfectant instructions for use of many of these agent's state that the agent should not be used on porous materials. Many webbing and stitching elements are extremely porous and when exposed to chemicals found in many disinfectants may degrade and ultimately affect the product's original design and strength requirements.

**Q: Can I clean my fall protection equipment?**

A: Yes, 3M personal fall protection equipment may be cleaned. You may reference to our cleaning Technical bulletin "Cleaning of Web Personal Fall Protection Products" (TB0005, <https://www.capitalsafetymedia.eu/downloads/?file=https://www.capitalsafetymedia.eu/media-library/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/TB0005EU-EN-C.pdf>) and the specific product user instruction manual for references. 3M has confirmed that the cleaning methods noted will not damage the equipment but cannot comment on the efficacy of the products ability for disinfecting. You may consult with the cleaner product manufacturer in reference to ability for disinfecting.

**Q: Is there any guidance available for cleaning and disinfection practices in the workplace?**

A: Yes, you may visit

<https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/advice-for-workplace-clean-19-03-2020.pdf>

or

[https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/mers/control\\_prevention.html](https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/mers/control_prevention.html)

**Q: Are Ozone chambers and Ultraviolet Light systems suitable for personal fall protection components and systems disinfection?**

A: 3M has identified consumer resources promoting disinfection solutions such as Ozone chambers and Ultraviolet Light systems for disinfection of materials and items such as sporting clothing, uniforms, gloves, linens and a variety of other porous materials. Although not directly advertised as being specifically suitable for use on personal fall protection components and systems, many fall protection equipment consumers are communicating to 3M of their interest in using these disinfecting options on products that we manufacture.

At 3M, we continue to understand users are seeking quick methods of disinfection solutions such as spray or wipe-on types of disinfectants for their PPE. Based on extensive research, 3M remains unaware of any disinfection processes that have been scientifically proven to both safely disinfect and not degrade the porous synthetic materials often used to manufacture safety harness web straps and shock absorbing lanyards. Many webbing and stitching elements are extremely porous and when exposed to chemicals found in many disinfectants may degrade and ultimately affect the product's original design and strength requirements.

Methods of disinfection including UV light and Ozone chambers are often discussed today in the occupational industry as a result of the current Covid-19 pandemic. Upon initial reviews, there are several concerns raised with their use on personal fall protection equipment.

- 1) UV light is often restricted from penetrating into porous materials such as harness webbing, essentially only exposing light on to the directed surface.
- 2) The complex geometry of a fall protection harness paired with the directional nature of UV light make it very challenging to ensure all surfaces are exposed adequately for disinfection.
- 3) UV exposure is known to cause damaging degradation in many synthetic materials such as polyamide and polyester commonly used in safety harness manufacture.

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- 4) 3M is not aware of any study showing how long and what type of UV light exposure is needed to physically kill COVID-19 virus on porous materials.
  - 5) Ozone is identified to be caustic in some capacity to materials commonly used in the manufacture of personal fall protection equipment. These materials may include mild steels, zinc, polypropylene, polyamide, aluminium, nitrile, reinforced plastics, galvanized steel and Polyoxymethylene (POM).
  - 6) We are not aware of any studies or data identifying exposure rates and concentration levels of these processes that may potentially damage safety harness(es) / lanyard(s) to the point of developing performance concerns or catastrophic failures of the personal fall arrest system(s).

It is critical we help our customers to understand the potential negative implications that certain types of non-approved disinfecting / cleaning exposures may have on these types of personal protective equipment specifically designed for fall protection applications. Unlike gloves, protective eyewear, coveralls, etc., that are generally intended to provide a layer/barrier of protection between the worker and the hazard, fall arrest systems are designed to be dynamically exposed and subjected to forces permitted by local standard and regulations of force applied to the body as a system.

- OSHA 29 CFR1910.140 and 29 CFR 1926.502 to be upwards of 1,800 pounds
- European standards covering Fall Protection products: up to 6kN

Degradation of webbing, stitching and other materials potentially caused by unapproved disinfecting/cleaning methods may produce dangerous impacts to performance of these devices when subjected to fall arrest forces.

In these times of uncertainty, we urge you to seek the support of your PPE manufacturers and suppliers. This should include reading and fully understanding their published product PPE documentation, user instructions and warnings including those warnings associated with their recommended disinfecting and cleaning agents.

① If you have any additional questions or concerns, please contact 3M Fall Protection, local contact can be made via website [3m.com/FallProtection](https://3m.com/FallProtection) or via email at [informationfallprotection@mmm.com](mailto:informationfallprotection@mmm.com)



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