

New Window Cleaning Standard Shines

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On October 25, 2001, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) approved the IWCA I-14.1 Window Cleaning Safety draft standard for publication as an American National Standard. The document, the result of nearly five years of work by members of the IWCA I-14 Committee, of which the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) International is a member, will help ensure the safety of the countless professionals who keep our buildings looking their best, and it provides commercial real estate with some much needed guidance in providing a safe environment for those individuals.

For almost half a century, professional window cleaning at commercial facilities developed without a clear and concise document regulating window cleaning operations. Equipment and practices evolved faster than standards and codes were being written. Consequently, newer and safer equipment was prohibited from use because their use was not authorized, despite the equipment having been found to provide a greater level of safety as a result of industry statistics, accident studies, research, and development. This lack of resource material and guidance for the professional window cleaner and the property manager fueled rapid changes within the window cleaning profession.

Recognizing the need for a new state of the art safety standard, the International Window Cleaning Association (IWCA), with the help of the Building Owners and Managers Association International and the rest of the window cleaning industry worked together to develop a consensus-based standard to raise the level of safety for the window cleaning industry. The result is a new ANSI Standard, the IWCA I-14.1. The ANSI/IWCA I-14.1 document supersedes all previous window cleaning standards. It has quickly become the resource guide the window cleaning industry regularly consults for guidance.

There are actually two different groups of professionals immediately affected by the new standard: property professionals and window cleaners. Building owners and managers are required to provide a safe building from which to work, and window cleaners are required to ply their trade within specific safe guidelines.

Most industry-recognized safety hazards are related to the use of transportable suspended access equipment on office buildings. With that in mind, there are several key issues within the I-14.1 Window Cleaning Safety Standard that require the attention and participation of building owners, managers, and their operating agents.

Assurances

Under the I-14 Standard, both the property manager and the window cleaning contractor are required to exchange written assurances to ensure worker safety and public protection.

Property professionals are required to provide documentation to their window cleaning contractor that covers the following areas of concern: permanent window-cleaning equipment installed on buildings such as a powered platforms; a copy of the maintenance records and inspection documents must be provided to the window cleaning contractor prior to the equipment being used; and all applicable information, from the manufacturers of the devices, including load ratings, intended use and limitations and instructions will also need to be supplied to the window cleaning contractor.

Window cleaning contractors also have specific requirements they must adhere to regarding training, site evaluation, proper anchorages and rigging practices, fall prevention, rescue, the environment, and dozens of other recognizable concerns. When followed, these new measures will help the contractor and the property manager deliver a superior product to tenants.

The Plan of Service

The I-14 Standard incorporates a concept entitled the "Plan of Service," which was developed so that the window cleaning contractor could effectively address all safety concerns at a jobsite or building prior to the service being performed.

The intent of the Plan of Service is to inform the building owner or operating agent when windows to be cleaned are located in areas where workers may utilize suspended equipment, specify how each worker's independent fall protection tieback should be placed for each individual descent, include the identification of hazardous areas, outline additional safety features, describe hazardous chemical use, and identify areas requiring public protection.

Fall Protection

Falls in the workplace represent the greatest hazard to professional window cleaners on a daily basis, and many building roofs are not equipped for proper fall protection. This fact is not limited to window cleaning contractors either. Many in-house building maintenance personnel as well as other tradesmen have to access the roof of a building, and they should also be afforded proper fall protection.

The I-14 states that "Fall protection, perimeter guarding, personal fall arrest systems or a personal fall restraint system (as applicable) shall be provided for all work areas that expose a worker to a fall hazard when approaching within 6 feet (1800mm) of an unguarded edge or

unguarded skylight (with the exception of working on a ladder supported at grade or using a window cleaner's belt)."

Property managers are left with many options for fall protection with this requirement, including perimeter guarding, fall restraint systems, warning line systems, and fall arrest systems.

Anchors and Anchorage

The most critical component in suspended access equipment system is what the suspension lines and safety lines are attached to on the roof of the building. An inspection of the roof of a building will reveal whether or not there are structural elements that can be used as adequate anchors or that the building may need to have anchors installed.

In order for window cleaning operations to be conducted properly, buildings must have properly identified anchorage points. These can be either roof anchors or other existing anchorage points that are certified. This is important to note because if a building is not fit with roof anchors as pictured, many buildings still may comply with the I-14 Standard because other structural elements existing on rooftops can be easily utilized and converted into "certified roof anchors" with the assistance of a structural engineer. For example, vertical columns for roof screens or structural framing supporting mechanical equipment are likely candidates for roof anchors.

Buildings without any form of anchorage must be retrofitted with roof anchors. The anchors must be designed by a registered professional engineer (P.E.) and inspected annually by a qualified person.

Final Assessment

Clearly, the new Standard details responsibilities for building owners, managers and window cleaning contractors that were previously cited through OSHA regulation, local law, or civil litigation after accidents. The I-14 experience proves that with clear communication and planning, we can all offer a safer work place for window cleaning operations.

A complete copy of The Property Professional's Guide To The ANSI/IWCA I-14.1 Window Cleaning Safety Standard can be purchased by calling 800-426-6292 or at www.boma.org.

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