



## TAILGATE

HUMAN-CENTRED HEALTH and SAFETY TRAINING MATERIALS

# TOOLBOX TALK: Winter Safety - Self-Retracting Lifelines & Personal Fall Limiters

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Crew / Site: \_\_\_\_\_

### How to Use This Safety Talk

This is a short, practical conversation guide - not a lecture. Read it in your own words make it personal for your crew by adding site specific examples, something you noticed recently or additions from your Company HS program. You don't need to memorize anything or sound polished - be yourself.

### Opening

I want to talk about self-retracting lifelines and personal fall limiters in winter, and why we don't treat them the same way we do in warmer weather. This isn't about questioning anyone's training or experience.

Everyone here knows what an SRL or PFL is supposed to do. If you don't, come see me and we'll make sure your training is current. *(Supervisor note: demonstrate how an SRL/PFL retracts and locks, and explain how it is intended to prevent a worker from reaching an edge or arrest a fall.)*

The issue in winter isn't skill – it's **equipment performance in cold conditions.**

SRLs and PFLs are mechanical devices. Cold temperatures, moisture, and ice can affect how they retract and, more importantly, how they **lock**. When an SRL or PFL doesn't lock as designed, the fall protection system may not perform as intended.

**At that point, relying on that equipment becomes a serious safety and legal issue.**

*(Supervisor note: Pause here and clearly explain the site-specific decision that has been made.)*

Based on current temperatures, site conditions, and **manufacturer instructions**, the employer/site coordinator will either:

- **restrict or prohibit the use of SRLs/PFLs in these conditions and implement an alternative fall protection method, or**
- **permit their use only with enhanced inspection, testing, storage, and supervision controls in place.**

This decision is made in consultation with the employer, the constructor where applicable, and the Health & Safety Representative or JHSC, and must always align with manufacturer limitations and the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

*Explain with clarity which decision has been made.*

### Why This Matters

I want to share why this matters so much. Some of you might remember this story. In January 2023, a 36-year-old worker, **Neil Despins**, was killed while working on a commercial roofing project in Belleville, Ontario.

He was trained in Working at Heights and was wearing a fall protection system that included a self-retracting lifeline.

- While moving corrugated metal sheeting, an unexpected opening was created in the roof.
- He fell approximately **14 metres (46 feet)**.
- The SRL he was connected to **did not arrest the fall**.
- The investigation found that the SRL, along with two others on site, had been exposed to moisture and then **froze in cold temperatures (-14°C)**.
- The locking mechanisms were rendered **inoperative**.

A safety alert was later issued identifying that this type of SRL was at risk of malfunctioning in low-temperature environments. So, this wasn't a lack of training or carelessness. This was equipment that **did not perform as intended in winter conditions**.

This is a strong reminder why we take SRL checks seriously - especially in cold weather.

## What We're Doing Differently Today

Before anyone connects to an SRL or personal fall limiter today, we're doing a few things on purpose:

- We perform a **hands-on function check** before use – every time
- We verify the lifeline **retracts smoothly** and **locks immediately** with a sharp pull
- We check for signs of moisture, ice, stiffness, or delayed response
- **We keep SRLs protected from moisture and extreme cold when not in use.** Do not leave them overnight in unheated vehicles, on roofs, or exposed to snow, rain, or condensation.
- We follow manufacturer temperature limits – no exceptions
- We slow down all connections and transitions at height
- We will use these controls to reduce risk (*add site-specific controls – refer to SRL Inspection*

*Checklist):*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**If an SRL doesn't behave exactly as expected, it is *tagged out and removed from service immediately.***

## What I Expect from You

- If an SRL feels stiff, slow, sticky, or unusual – don't trust it.
- Check frequently throughout your shift to make sure it is still engaging. If it fails or behaves unexpectedly while you are at height, stop work immediately and signal for assistance - we will need to get you down safely or provide a replacement piece of equipment.
- If it doesn't retract smoothly or lock instantly during a function test, report it and we'll switch it out. There's no such thing as "probably fine" with fall protection.
- I'll say this again - do not leave any SRL or PFL overnight in unheated vehicles, on roofs, or exposed to snow, rain, or condensation.

You also have a duty to report hazards you see others dealing with. If you notice someone using gear that isn't behaving properly, stop it and let me know.

**If the equipment can't be trusted in these cold conditions, the work stops until we have a safe solution.**

### Quick Crew Check-In (Optional)

- Has anyone noticed SRLs behaving differently in this cold?
- Does anyone need help checking their gear before we start?
- What equipment would you prefer to use to remain safe today at heights?

### TOOLBOX TALK: Winter SRLs & Personal Fall Limiters

#### Attendance Sheet

Company/Site: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Supervisor Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Workers in Attendance:

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 \_\_\_\_\_
- 7 \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 \_\_\_\_\_
- 9 \_\_\_\_\_
- 10 \_\_\_\_\_
- 11 \_\_\_\_\_
- 12 \_\_\_\_\_
- 13 \_\_\_\_\_
- 14 \_\_\_\_\_
- 15 \_\_\_\_\_

**Winter Use - SRL/PFL Inspection Checklist - OSHA / O. Reg. 213/91 Aligned Control Checklist**

Project / Location: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of SRL/PFL (Make, Model): \_\_\_\_\_

Temperature and Weather Conditions Today: \_\_\_\_\_

ITEM	PASS	FAIL	CONTROLS / COMMENTS
<b>EQUIPMENT CONDITION</b> (O. Reg. 213/91 – s. 93; OHS s. 25)			
SRL visually inspected before use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Lifeline free of ice, snow, moisture buildup	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Housing free of cracks, dents, or damage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Labels and ratings legible	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>FUNCTIONAL PERFORMANCE</b> (Manufacturer / CSA Z259)			
Lifeline retracts smoothly when pulled slowly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
SRL locks immediately with sharp pull	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No hesitation, drag, or stiffness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
SRL suitable for current temperature	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>USE &amp; CONNECTION</b> (O. Reg. 213/91 – s. 79; OHS s. 28)			
Compatible connector and anchor used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Clear access to anchor point	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No sharp edges or abrasion hazards	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Connection made without overreaching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL &amp; WEATHER CONDITIONS</b> (OHS s. 25(2)(h))			
Temperature and wind assessed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No freezing rain or rapid temperature swings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
SRLs protected from moisture when not in use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Equipment reassessed if conditions change	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE &amp; SUPERVISORY CONTROLS</b> (OHS s. 25, s. 27)			
Workers briefed on winter SRL risks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Expectations set for function testing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Workers encouraged to report concerns	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Alternate control used if SRL unreliable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

**Decision:**

- SRL controls adequate – work may proceed
- SRL controls inadequate – SRL removed / alternate control required

Supervisor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Inspection: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes / Additional Controls:

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**Compliance**

This checklist documents winter-specific hazard assessment, functional testing of fall protection equipment, and supervisory oversight in accordance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act and Ontario Regulation 213/91.

**Any SRL not performing as intended is immediately removed from service.**

**Work at heights is suspended where worker safety cannot be confirmed.**

**Final decisions on equipment use, restrictions, or substitutions remain the responsibility of the employer or constructor in accordance with manufacturer instructions and applicable legislation.**