

FORD vs. DODGE

I figured FORD vs. DODGE can help explain the issue of mixing fall protection and rescue equipment from one manufacturer to the next. There is a misconception that as long as fall protection equipment is purchased from one manufacturer, it is all compatible. This isn't true. Some people think or are told, that they have to source fall protection equipment from one manufacturer to ensure compatibility and that it is illegal or unsafe to mix products from different manufacturers. This is not true or required and it certainly doesn't ensure compatibility or the safety of the user.

Everyone recognizes the need to mix manufacturers' equipment (some may argue this point). Even the most complete product lines don't solve all applications. Product will inevitably get mixed when you consider all applications, rescue, availability of products, innovation, and budgets. OSHA often says "follow manufacturer instructions" so, if a manufacturer doesn't endorse mixing products, people are stuck between wanting to use the right product and trying to get permission from two different manufacturers to mix and match equipment.

It is important to recognize that incompatibility exists within every manufacturer's product line. Buying from one manufacturer does not ensure compatibility. It makes purchasing and training easier, but it does not increase the level of safety for the user. For example, using a large snap hook is incompatible with a foot-level sliding beam clamp, even if both products are from the same manufacturer. Every manufacturer has a large snap hook option and everyone has a sliding beam clamp. This combination is incompatible. The large hook, anchored at foot level with the surrounding D-ring and beam edges is a bad connection. If a 6 ft FF energy absorbing lanyard or Class 1 SRL is used in this application, which every manufacturer also has, the system is incompatible for more reasons than the large snap hook and D-ring combination. Incompatible connections and incompatible systems can be assembled and exist within every product line. Putting safe and compliant systems together is not as simple as buying from one source.

There are a couple of OSHA Letters of Interpretation that address this topic, [Oct. 23, 2012 LOI](#) and [Feb. 19, 2004 LOI](#). In both letters, OSHA allows mixing providing the components are compatible. In the 2012 letter, OSHA writes that an employer should consider manufacturers' statements of compatibility when determining compatibility. If mixing of equipment is taking place, an employer must be able to demonstrate that the components of a fall arrest system produced by different manufacturers are compatible with each other. Both letters only address mixing equipment concerning connector compatibility, but I believe the same position would be taken in regards to all compatibility issues (force, fall distance, function, etc.).



When two parts require each other to ***work as intended***, buying from one manufacturer is important. Some products are unique and will not work without a specific counterpart. Using the [Reliance Concrete Embedded Receiver Anchorage](#) as an example, it will only ***work as intended*** with the [Concrete Embedded Connector](#). Neither works without the other. The only way they are compatible is if you use them together. The same can be said for any system requiring a specific part like the [Werner Evo](#), [Kee Safety Kee Guard Guardrail](#), [3M Lad-Safe](#), [Petzl ASAP Lock](#), and dozens of others. Any products interdependent to function correctly must be used together. An easy way to understand compatibility is the phrase "***work as intended***".

A two-inch ID, 5K, zinc-coated D-ring put out by 3M will work the same way as a two-inch ID, 5K, zinc-coated D-ring put out by Miller. You can insert the name of any manufacturer in the previous sentence; a two-inch ID, 5k, zinc-coated D-ring, is what it is no matter who puts it out. In reality, in many instances, the fall protection D-ring comes from the same raw product manufacturer (Yoke, Pensafe,

USANG, etc.). Sometimes it is the same D-ring. Look at the strength, flexibility, location, and dimensions of the D-ring to determine compatibility, not the name on it.

So, OSHA accepts mixing compatible equipment, let's turn to the manufacturers and review the position they are in. This is where my catchy title comes in. The scope of a manufacturer's authority only extends to their products. For several reasons, FORD will not put into writing that it's acceptable to use DODGE parts. Even if the part is the same and FORD is OK with its use, FORD has no authority to speak to DODGE products and vice versa. FORD cannot comment on the use or applications of DODGE products, for any reason. FORD does not want the additional liability of including parts they have no power to change, recall, re-label, improve, or influence in any way. FORD does not want to support any products that they didn't sell, nor should they. Fall protection is the same way. Fall protection Manufacturer A (insert anyone's name here) has no authority to speak to Manufacturer B (insert competing manufacturer name here) product; even if it is the same part, will work, and function as intended.

You will often see statements in instructions like "use compatible equipment", "use ANSI Z359.X compliant equipment", "use energy absorbers that limit AAF to 900 lbs." or similar statements. This is good for fall protection programs. It opens the door for you to apply the right tool for the job without violating instructions and the manufacturer hasn't overstepped their authority. It puts the responsibility



on the right entity. Whoever decides to place those items together has the responsibility to make sure they will **work as intended**. This aligns with OSHA's position that the employer has the burden to determine the compatibility of mixed components. Thankfully, the majority of harnesses, lanyards, SRLs, carabiners, snap hooks, anchorage connectors, rescue systems, and temporary HLLs are interchangeable.

The solution for employers is to have a person within your organization that knows what equipment can and cannot be mixed. A person who is capable of identifying existing and predictable hazards with fall protection PPE and has the authority to take prompt corrective measures is necessary when working with mixed equipment ([WAH Competent / Trainer](#)). Someone who can determine what products can be safely mixed and which ones cannot, not only for connector compatibility, but for arresting force, function, clearance, and rescue planning. After an organization has its people in place, I often recommend selecting one or two primary vendors, not for compatibility reasons but for quality, supply, price, service, and training. It's advantageous to stay with a single manufacturer, but don't be afraid to get the right tool for the job, even if it is from a different manufacturer providing it **works as intended**.

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