



10/11/2004

Scaffold Clamp Safety Alert

Scaffold clamps hold tubes together for building platforms used in construction and industrial maintenance. Such clamps are installed by tightening nuts for bolts built into the clamp, which capture a “cap” that wraps around the tube. The operation of these components, especially the threads on a bolt, can be adversely affected by being exposed to water, sand, splashed concrete, paint, chemicals, etc. They can also be damaged as a result of being struck by another object during transportation and handling. Threads that are damaged or otherwise obstructed prevent free travel of the nut along the length of the bolt. A higher wrench force is required to tighten bolts with such thread interference, which produces what is referred to as “false torque” (i.e., a misleading indication of how tightly fastened the bolt is). Applying the full amount of torque for installing the clamp specified by its manufacturer will normally cause the nut to pass over any degraded thread area and permit workers to securely and safely fasten the clamp.

However, Safway Services, Inc., a scaffold equipment supplier headquartered in Wisconsin, has notified us that some clamps recently distributed in the U.S. have been found to be prone to premature thread damage simply from being fastened to a 1.69” inch (outside diameter) tube. The damage results from the cap, as manufactured, scraping the threads of the bolt when it is being tightened in place. Safway has determined that a batch of clamps distributed in 2004 is prone to thread damage sufficient to generate an amount of false torque equal to that of a fully tightened assembly, even though the clamp may still be too loose. If left undetected, a loose clamp could lead to a scaffold collapse and cause serious personal injury or death.

The manufacturer of the affected clamps, working through Safway, is offering to replace them. Safway is in the process of notifying each of its customers that may have received these clamps, which can be identified as follows:

- a) The caps are shaped like a clamshell and bear impression stamps showing the words “SAFWAY” and “ITALY” (See Photo 1.)
- b) The undersides of the caps DO NOT have the two indentations shown in Photo 2.

Please be advised that the company that manufactured the clamps for Safway produces identical clamps for other clamp suppliers. Safway has also tested “copy-cat” clamps made in other countries that are prone to the same kind of thread damage. Therefore, it is imperative that all clamps be carefully inspected when installed to ensure that the bolts are, in fact, fully tightened according to the manufacturer’s specifications. If any clamp appears to get stuck before it is fully tightened, even though the manufacturer’s specified amount of torque is being applied, it should be taken out of use--regardless of its markings--and the contractor/supplier involved should be promptly notified.



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Scaffold Clamp Safety Alert (continued)

You are reminded that OSHA requires competent scaffold erectors to inspect and evaluate all scaffold components, including clamps, before and during the installation process. Deteriorated clamps that cannot be fully tightened for any reason should be scrapped or isolated for maintenance or repair.

Should you have any questions, you can contact Safway through its Customer Services department at (800) 558-4772.



Photo 1

Top Side of Cap "Safway" and "Italy"



Photo 2

Underside of cap showing two indentations.

For proper use and installation for Safway clamps, Tube and Clamp User Safety Guidelines, ORN 402, can be downloaded using the attached link:

<http://www.safway.com/products/content/safetypdf/ORN402.pdf>