

Anchor man

JACKIE BROWN-HAYSOM talks to the man behind SAFETOR Roof Anchors, winner of the *Safeguard* award for best design or technology initiative.

“I’ve come off quite a few roofs – just slipped off the edge because of dust or dew or something.

“What did I do about fall protection? I’d start early in the morning when I couldn’t see the ground – what you can’t see you don’t worry about.”

“You’re asking people to risk their lives with your products, so you have to make sure everything is 100%.” Nick Collins

Nick Collins knows the value of fall protection better than most. The after-effects of three “significant” falls brought his 25-year career as a roofer to an end – and, ironically, inspired his new career as a designer of roof anchors.

From a man who once treated falls from height as part of the job, Collins has become a passionate height safety campaigner.

“Nobody means to fall, but when they do they end up like me, with bad health that gets worse as they get older, or in a wheelchair for the rest of their lives, or in a coffin.”

Reputation for quality

Roofing was Collins’ passion, and it was a wrench to give it up.

By 1997, when he decided his body had had enough, he was running his own business with seven employees, a number of significant projects under his belt, and a reputation for quality work.

“It gave me great satisfaction to finish a job and know I’d never have to go back because of leaks or anything,” he says.

This same desire for excellence has shaped his roof anchor business. *Collins Corporation* is still a cottage industry, with Collins and his wife packing **SAFETOR Roof Anchors** in the garage of their Napier home, but its quality and professional commitment is already attracting attention.

Inventing solutions

Collins began experimenting with safety lines in the roofing industry. If he was cavalier about his own safety, he did not put employees at risk, even if he had to invent his own solutions.

“We were putting the roof on a new building at the Pan Pac sawmill, 18 metres off the ground,” he says. “I bought harnesses and all the equipment for my guys, and asked the supplier, when we have the roof on, what do we attach them to? He shrugged and said ‘I don’t know’, so I went away and developed my own roof anchor and got it made by a local engineer.”

This fired his imagination, and he began working on commercial attachment systems, developing a design where the eye bolt screwed into the fitting so it could be removed when not in use. It provided a clean roof-line, but meant that the anchor hooks had to be relocated and replaced every time they were needed.

Safety and versatility

In subsequent years Collins expanded his range, adding exposed anchors with permanently fixed hooks that allowed workers to secure safety lines as soon as they reached the roof top.

His designs were laboratory tested, to ensure compliance with AS/NZS1891.4:2000, and to

determine the best materials and finishes. He settled on mild steel anchors coated with zinc epoxy and a UV-inhibitor, a combination that provides strength and durability but allows the bolts to bend under extreme load, absorbing some of the impact and showing that the anchor has been stressed and must be replaced.

If safe design was top of the agenda, versatility was Collins’ second priority. SAFETOR stands for Safe Anchors for Every Type of Roof, and he has worked hard to ensure the products live up to their name. Hooks can be anchored to timber or steel, on new or existing roofs, and used with all types of cladding.

His winning entry in the 2007 *Safeguard* awards was an anchor design that allows standard timber roof trusses to absorb 15 kiloNewtons (about 1.5 tonnes) of load without damage.

Correct installation

By early 2006 the products had been picked up by a major safety retailer and were starting to do well, but Collins was concerned about the risk of anchors being incorrectly installed.

“Installation is a huge safety issue. The regulations say any competent person can install roof anchors – that’s basically anyone with a heartbeat – but eventually someone is going to be killed because an anchor has been fitted to something that can’t take the load.”

He decided he couldn’t risk this happening with his products, and withdrew the range from the market, resolving to make it available only through local agents who had been trained to handle installation.

Approved agents

It was a brave decision, and inevitably cost him sales. Collins



Jackie Brown-Haysom

took work as a digger driver to tide the company over the self-imposed downturn.

Now, 18 months later, he has 20 approved agents around the country – reputable roofing companies and industrial abseilers who have completed unit standard 15757 on fall arrest systems – and the business is growing again. He is confident it will soon be paying its way, and has no regrets.

“The situation was getting quite serious – a couple of my anchors had been condemned because of the way they were installed – so we had to make a stand and change what we were doing.

“You’re asking people to risk their lives with your products, so you have to make sure everything is 100%.” ■