



Matt Hunt, Market Manager with Sterling Rope belays for Steve Rodriguez, Work & Rescue Salesperson as he ascends their new climbing wall.

## Architecture for Training - Sterling Rope's Innovative Center for Training Specialists in the Proper Use of Their Products

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Patric Santerre, Licensed Architect~Industrial Designer

The athleticism of an arborist swinging high in a tree cutting dead branches is impressive, as is a firefighter hanging from a building or ladder in a daring life-safety rescue. What they both have in common is rope and what both professions regularly need is training in the proper use of the rope. Sterling Rope in Biddeford, Maine understands this need. Sterling is a major U.S. manufacturer of life-safety rope, cord, and hardware, used by rock climbers, arborist, firefighters and radio tower technicians. They are redefining the relationship between manufacturer and customer by offering simulation training space within their factory for companies and organizations who need to teach or certify their employees in rescue techniques using rope.

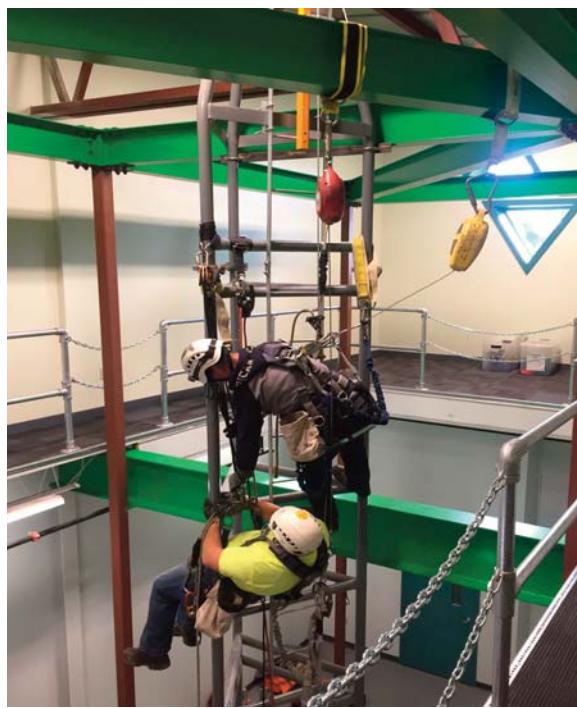
Sterling's new training center is the brainchild of President and Founder Carolyn Brodsky and CFO Peter Schwarzenbach. Working closely with architect and industrial designer Patric Santerre, and interior designer and planner Celeste Bard of ARCADIA designworks, and Becker Structural Engineers, the design team took a sustainable "reuse" approach to renovating 5,500 sq. ft. of windowless, maze-like, mezzanine space inside their factory. Floor plans were scrutinized to take advantage of existing interior walls, and doors, frames, and hardware were itemized for reuse. Hardypond Construction and their sub-contractors complimented the design team, taking special care in salvaging equipment, preparing existing stud walls for new gypsum wallboard and paint, and by suggesting material substitutions that when appropriate helped save time and reduce costs.



New England Chapter-International Society of Arboriculture, 2016 Tree Climbing Competition, Deering Oaks Park, Portland, Maine

Featured within the training center are two angled walls for rock climbing, a free-standing 30-ft. radio tower and a vertical wall with removable window and door plugs for training firefighters. Justin Pitts, safety director for East Coast Communications during a recent recertification session for high tower technicians commented that "the key to the new facility is the adjacency of the new classroom to the training center." This layout enables him to transition from a formal lecture space to a clerestory space where a portion of an actual radio tower stands. Here he can instruct his students in the proper use of rope and hardware in simulated rescue situations.

Also, in order to improve travel distance for the engineers, Sterling relocated their drop tower rope testing equipment next to the new open-plan engineering office. With the introduction of natural light through banks of exterior windows and a workout room with exercise equipment and showers, the once dark and worn space has been transformed into a dynamic, modern facility. "This is a cool building type that we enjoyed designing with Carolyn and Peter," says Patric with ARCADIA designworks. "If more American manufacturers, like Sterling, offered training in the use of their products in close proximity to their factory and R&D, one would think that the immediate feedback from trainers and trainees would greatly increase the quality of American products."



Images: Top Right - East Coast Communications training session.  
Bottom Right - Sterling Rope's new engineering research and development office space.  
Bottom Left - Sterling Rope's new climbing/training center.

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