

Weekly Safety Meetings Premium Membership

Safety Training for the Construction Industry

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Nebraska Building Chapter AGC
Think safety first!

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National Fall Prevention Stand-Down

OSHA has called for a National Fall Prevention Stand-Down from June 2nd through June 6th. During the stand-down, workers and their supervisors are asked to pause during the workday and talk about fall hazards and fall prevention. The goal is to reduce the number of falls in construction.

Unfortunately, falls account for the largest number of deaths in the construction industry. Those fatalities are completely preventable with the right planning and training. If we understand the hazards and the choices we need to make to stay safe, we can avoid falls. Let's take a moment to discuss some of the common mistakes that lead to falls.

One common mistake is not planning for the task at hand. When we work at heights, whether it's on a ladder, a scaffold, roof, etc., we have to plan ahead. Decide how the job will be done, what tools and materials you'll need, how you'll reach your work, how you'll manage the specific hazards involved, and what safety equipment you'll need to complete each task.

For instance, take ladders. When you need a ladder, don't just grab one and start climbing. Get the right ladder: straight or step, aluminum or fiberglass? Check it out: Are all the feet there? Do both of the spreaders work? Is it rated (read the label) for your weight plus tools and materials? Set it up safely and securely. Use the 4-to-1 rule for straight ladders. Should you wear a fall harness? How will you get the tools and materials to the top of the ladder and hold them? You're going to put your life on that ladder; make sure it's safe.

Another mistake is taking chances. Nobody comes to work expecting to fall, but that's not the same as working to avoid a fall. When you work at an unprotected edge, stand on the rail of a scaffold, or lean a little too far on a ladder, you're taking chances. Each time you take chances like this, your mind registers that you did it and "got away with it." You teach yourself that these chances are "OK" and it gets easier for you to take them. Break the pattern. Identify fall hazards and then take action to avoid getting hurt. If you work 6 feet or more above a lower surface, you have to be protected from falling. Common fall protection solutions include personal fall arrest systems, guardrails, and safety nets.

A third mistake is not relying on your knowledge and training. Falls can be prevented when you understand how to properly set up and use safety equipment. Many workers make deadly mistakes like: not securing the top of a ladder, tying off to anchors that are not designed for fall arrest, bypassing safety devices, and wearing fall harnesses that are too big or not adjusted properly. These are all choices that we know are wrong. If you do not already know about fall protection, tell your supervisor and get trained. If you do know, use that knowledge and training to keep yourself alive.

SAFETY REMINDER

You're two times more likely to fall when you're climbing down a ladder than when you're climbing up. The main cause of falls from straight and extension ladders is the base of the ladder sliding away from the support.

NOTES:

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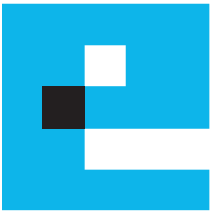
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Drugs on the Jobsite

You've seen it in the news: an honor student or athlete becomes addicted to a prescription painkiller like OxyContin, finds that habit too difficult or expensive to maintain, finds heroin to be cheaper and easier to get, and dies of an overdose. Drug use, abuse, and addiction are serious problems in many communities across the US right now. In the workforce, the construction industry has one of the highest rates of drug abuse.

Consider these sobering facts on prescription painkiller abuse from the National Safety Council:

- 45 people die every day from prescription painkillers like OxyContin. That's more deaths than heroin and cocaine overdoses combined.
- For people who are between 35 and 54 years old, unintentional drug overdoses cause more deaths than motor vehicle crashes.
- More than 70 percent of people who abused prescription pain relievers report getting them from friends or relatives.

At first, drugs in the community may not seem like a jobsite safety problem. But consider this: 70% of the estimated 14.8 million Americans who use illegal drugs are employed. Moreover, employees who abuse drugs are 3.5 times more likely to be in an accident at work than other workers. Would you be safe if your co-worker were high on drugs? Do you want him running a crane, or using a nail gun next to you? Drug abuse can endanger everyone on the jobsite.

Workers who abuse prescription painkillers:

- May not be able to think clearly, may not exercise good judgment, or may not control their behavior.
- Might fall asleep while working.
- Tend to produce work that is inconsistent or poor in quality.
- Have low productivity or erratic work patterns.
- Take more sick days, longer lunch breaks, and leave early more often than other employees.
- Can be careless, take unnecessary risks, and do things that are dangerous.
- May not seem to care about workplace safety.

It usually isn't a good idea to directly confront someone you think is using drugs. If you suspect a co-worker is using drugs, notify your supervisor immediately. Don't wait for an accident to happen, or for your co-worker to hit rock bottom. Report anyone who isn't fit to work. Get past concerns about being a snitch. The person using drugs is putting you at direct risk and ultimately needs help. Talking to your supervisor is the right thing to do. The jobsite is a dangerous enough place to work without adding extra hazards created by the bad choices of a drug user.

SAFETY REMINDER

If you are the one who needs help, talk with your doctor or someone you trust.

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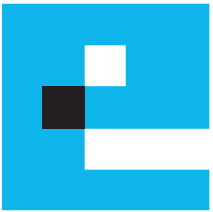
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Hot Weather Safety

Working outside in hot and humid summer weather isn't just uncomfortable—it can be downright dangerous. Working in hot environments can result in heat rashes, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke. Heat can also increase your chances of suffering an injury if your palms get sweaty and slippery, if your safety glasses fog up and reduce your vision, or if you become dehydrated and dizzy.

First, let your body adjust to the hot weather. Almost everyone can get used to the heat, but it can take 5 to 7 days. While your body changes so that it can tolerate higher temperatures, be sure to take breaks, stay cool, and don't work too hard. Getting adjusted to the heat doesn't make you invincible. You can still suffer heat illnesses, so be careful.

Second, stay hydrated. Your body can produce as much as 2 gallons of sweat during a day's work in the heat. Make sure that you are drinking enough to replace the fluids you're losing. Water and electrolyte replacement drinks are best. Stay away from soft drinks, alcohol, beverages that contain lots of caffeine, and "sports" drinks that contain lots of sugar. You should be drinking about 8 ounces of water every 15 to 20 minutes to stay hydrated. Don't wait until you are thirsty to drink; if you do, you're already too late because thirst is a sign of dehydration. You should not try to drink a whole gallon of water at lunch and then another at the end of the day.

Third, plan for the heat. When possible, try to schedule the heaviest or hardest work for the coolest time of the day.

Perhaps you can start work earlier in the morning. Schedule time to take breaks in the shade or a cool area. Wear light-colored, light-weight clothing. Cotton is better than wool, and some new synthetic fibers are better than cotton.

Heat stress can be a killer. Learn to recognize the symptoms in yourself and your co-workers. The symptoms include: feeling faint or dizzy; nausea; heavy sweating; a rapid but weak heartbeat; cool, moist, pale skin; low-grade fever; heat cramps; headache; fatigue; and dark-colored urine. Heat stress can quickly become a medical emergency. Pay attention to yourself and other people working with you. If someone shows signs of heat stress, that person needs to cool down. Get him or her to a cool or shady area. Use water or fans if necessary. Call 911 if his or her condition doesn't improve or if it gets worse.

Keep in mind that age, physical condition, hydration level, and certain medications will affect how the human body handles high temperatures and heavy physical exertion. If you have a health condition or are taking medications, talk with your doctor about how you should handle working in a hot environment.

Heat hazards can be handled like other hazards: identify the danger, make a plan, and take action so you don't get hurt.

SAFETY REMINDER

Solar radiation—sunshine—can cook your skin and cause skin cancer. Use sun block to protect your skin.

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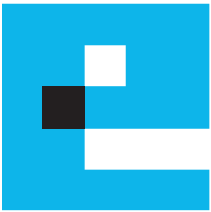
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Housekeeping

Housekeeping on the job is everyone's responsibility. Keeping the jobsite clean will help eliminate some hazards so you don't get hurt. It can also help you get your job done faster. On the other hand, poor housekeeping contributes to accidents, creates hazards, and causes you to spend valuable time searching for parts and tools.

Housekeeping isn't just about cleaning up at the end of your shift or about the final cleanup when the project is finished. Housekeeping is most effective when it's an ongoing effort throughout the day, every day. Picture a jobsite with trash piling up, scrap lumber on the ground, and crates and drums just lying around. That mess is dangerous, it slows you down, and it's an invitation to an OSHA inspector to come in and look for other hazards that aren't being addressed.

Poor housekeeping leads to serious accidents and injuries. You can trip and fall because someone left banding on the ground, or ran extension cords across the stairs. You could be hit by falling objects, slip on muddy stairs, or get cut by protruding nails and sharp materials. Scrap and debris create fire hazards. Garbage attracts bugs and rodents.

Follow good housekeeping practices:

- Keep your work area neat and orderly. Organize tools, supplies, equipment, and scrap.
- Clean as you go. Don't wait until the end of the day or the end of the week to clean up.
- Sweep up chips, shavings, and sawdust.

- Keep piles neat and tidy. This applies to new materials and to scrap and waste too.
- Put waste materials into the proper bins or dumpsters as you work. Many projects separate waste into containers for concrete, metal, wood, etc., for recycling or cheaper disposal.
- Avoid the mess by taking only as much of a material or chemical as you need.
- Keep floors and walking surfaces free of cords, tools, and other tripping hazards.
- Remove combustible waste like lumber, paper, and cardboard from your work area so they don't become a fire hazard.
- Keep scrap lumber that has protruding nails or screws away from work areas and walkways. Remove nails, screws, etc., from lumber before it goes in the dumpster so no one gets cut.
- Clean up spills immediately—and properly.
- Dispose of rags soaked in any flammable liquid in a steel safety can with a lid that closes tightly.
- Report bathrooms or portable toilets that need to be cleaned or need towels or hand sanitizer.
- Keep break areas clean. Pick up dropped food. Put wrappers and unwanted food in the trash.

SAFETY REMINDER

Good housekeeping includes keeping the gangbox and your truck box organized and squared away.

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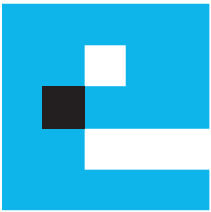
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Summer Help

Quite often, the beginning of summer is a time when new, young workers join the construction workforce. Teenage workers can be injured on the job when they don't receive adequate training, when they are not properly supervised, when they use unsafe equipment, and when they try to do jobs that they are not legally allowed to do. Every year, about 70 adolescents die from work injuries in the US, and 70,000 get hurt badly enough that they have to go to the emergency room.

Young workers want to do their jobs well, but they aren't always familiar with the hazards around them and they often don't feel comfortable asking questions. Each of us can take a few moments during the day to give these workers some pointers and guidance so they make it through the workday safely.

Be aware that there are many tasks that young workers cannot do. The laws vary from state to state, but in general, kids under 18 years of age CANNOT:

- Operate many types of powered equipment like circular saws, chainsaws, woodworking machines, and metal-forming machines.
- Operate a forklift at all or drive a motor vehicle as a regular part of the job.
- Do wrecking, demolition, excavation, or roofing.
- Work where explosives are stored or used.
- Work where they are exposed to radiation.

Show young workers how to do their jobs safely and correctly. Keep in mind that for most of them, this is the first time they are doing many of these tasks. Walk them through the safe way to do the job, then watch them do it. Emphasize that shortcuts can be deadly. Check back with them later to make sure they're still doing the job well.

Set a good example as you work. They are watching you to see how to act and how to do the job. Don't take shortcuts or break any rules. They will pick up your bad habits and that could put them in danger or get them hurt.

Even though they've had safety training, there's nothing like having an experienced worker show them how to use safety equipment. Tell them when they need to use it, where to find it, how to use it, and how to take care of it. Point out the safety features of tools and equipment they will use.

If YOU are the young person on the job, focus on safety:

- Follow all safety rules and procedures.
- Wear the personal protective equipment you need and wear it correctly.
- Keep your work area clean and orderly.
- Always know what to do in an emergency such as a fire, injury, accident, or severe weather.
- Ask questions whenever you're unsure.

SAFETY REMINDER

Young or old, don't work distracted. Take the earbuds out.

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