Weekly Safety Meetings Premium Membership
Safety Training for the Construction Industry

Brad Smith Roofing Co., Inc.
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Safe Work Practices

Construction work is dangerous, but it's possible—and not even very hard—to get the job done safely if we all make safety a priority. Today, let's discuss some best practices for working safely in construction.

- Always wear the right personal protective equipment (PPE) for the task.
- Never take shortcuts.
- Never bypass a safety device.
- Never work on energized circuits.
- Never enter an unprotected trench.
- Never enter a confined space without following the confined space protocol.
- Always tie off—properly—when you work at heights.
- Always look up to see if there are power lines close to your work.
- Don't stand on either of the top two steps of a stepladder.
- Before welding, make sure there are no combustibles or flammables in the area.
- Always wear your seat belt when operating a piece of heavy equipment or any vehicle.
- Never use your leg as a sawhorse.
- Never stand on the forks of a forklift so you can reach a little higher.
- Never operate a vehicle or any equipment if you are under the influence of alcohol or any drugs.
- Don't text and drive—ever!
- Always read and obey signs, tags, and labels.
- Reduce your speed in work zones.
- Never walk behind a moving dump truck.
- When you work on a dump truck with the bed raised, confirm that the bed is blocked or locked in place so it cannot fall on you.
- Wear cut-resistant gloves when you use a razor knife.
- Never participate in horseplay.
- Always pay attention during safety training and safety orientations.
- Never stand under a suspended load.
- Never enter a crane's swing radius.
- Always plug into receptacles protected by GFCIs.
- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for tools, equipment, and PPE.
- Disconnect the power source when changing the blade on a power saw.
- Never point a powder-actuated tool at another person.
- **Always speak up and ask questions when you don't understand something.**

SAFETY REMINDER

Hazards don't go away when you ignore them.

NOTES:

SPECIAL TOPICS /EMPLOYEE SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS/NOTES:

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MEETING DOCUMENTATION:

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Using Fire Extinguishers

Do you know where the fire extinguishers are on the jobsite? If not, find out. Fire extinguishers are a critical part of a fire prevention program. Used properly, they save lives and property because they help you put out small fires or at least help control a fire until firefighters arrive. What should you think about before you start to fight a fire, and what is the best way to use a fire extinguisher?

When a fire starts, the first thing you should do is **sound the fire alarm** and/or **call 911.** Then, before you decide to use a fire extinguisher, answer these questions: Do I have the right type of extinguisher? Is the fire small and not spreading? Is the area relatively cool and free of smoke? Do I have an exit route that takes me away from the fire? Is it likely that I can put the fire out with one extinguisher? If you answer "No" to any one of these questions, evacuate immediately. Never try to fight a fire that is spreading to other materials, that has flames higher than your head, or that is making enough smoke that your visibility is limited. Don't hesitate, evacuate!

Fires are classified by the material or fuel that is burning:

Class A fires involve ordinary combustibles such as wood, paper, cloth, rubber, and plastics.

Class B fires involve flammable liquids like gasoline, oils, paint thinner, lacquer, grease, solvents, and tar.

Class C fires involve energized electrical equipment like wiring, fuse boxes, appliances, and computers.

Class D fires involve combustible metals like magnesium, titanium, and potassium.

The type of fire extinguisher you use to put out a fire is determined by what is burning, or the **class** of fire. When a fire starts, you have to figure out what class it is and use an extinguisher that matches that class. Extinguishers are marked with combinations of the letters A, B, C, and D to indicate the class or classes of fire they will put out. The most common extinguishers are marked "ABC" indicating that they will work on Class A, B, and C fires. These are usually multi-use, dry chemical extinguishers. Today, before there's a fire, find out where the fire extinguishers are on our site and learn what classes of fire they will put out.

If you use a fire extinguisher, follow the **P.A.S.S.** technique to put out the fire.

- **P.** **P**ull the pin so you can use the extinguisher.
- **A.** **A**im low. Point the nozzle at the base of the fire.
- **S.** **S**queeze the handle to release the extinguishing agent.
- **S.** **S**weep the nozzle back and forth from side to side, keeping it aimed at the base of the flames.

When the extinguisher is empty, drop it and get out. Exit the building or area immediately, whether or not the fire is out. Do not go back into the building until the fire department says that it's okay to do so.

SAFETY REMINDER

Keep in mind that fire extinguishers for Class D fires are usually not found on construction sites.

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Silica

Silica is a common mineral found in many materials on construction sites, like soil, sand, concrete, brick, block, mortar, and granite. When we cut, chip, grind, drill into, or otherwise break or disturb these materials, crystalline silica particles can become airborne and create health hazards. OSHA has developed a new rule regarding silica which comes into effect this year. The best thing about the new rule is Table 1, which discusses dust and respiratory controls to help keep you healthy.

When they're airborne, tiny particles of silica can be inhaled into your lungs. Once you breathe them in, the particles can cause lung disease, lung cancer, kidney disease, and silicosis. Silicosis can be disabling, and even fatal. When silica dust enters the lungs, it can cause scarring that reduces the lungs' ability to take in oxygen. There is no cure for silicosis. And the damage caused by silicosis can make you more susceptible to other lung illnesses such as tuberculosis. It only takes a small amount of silica dust to create a big health hazard for you. If you are exposed to silica dust regularly, stop smoking. Smoking can further increase damage to your lungs.

OSHA's new construction standard (29 CFR 1926.1153) on silica goes into effect (with a few exceptions) on September 23rd of this year. The new rule reduces the permissible exposure limit (PEL) for respirable silica to 50 micrograms per cubic meter of air, averaged over an 8-hour shift. Table 1 in the new standard lists exposure control methods for common construction tasks. When you use specific dust control methods during specific silica-producing operations, your risk of inhaling silica goes down so much that it becomes unnecessary for the company to monitor or assess your exposure to silica dust. For example, if you are using a stationary masonry saw that has an integrated water delivery system to continuously douse the blade with water, silica dust will not become airborne, and you won't breathe it in.

Sometimes when the work you're doing is creating silica dust, you need respiratory protection even if you're using engineering controls. Table 1 lists the level of protection you'll need, depending on the kind of work and where you're working. In some cases, you may need an N95 or P95 particulate respirator.

So before you use a masonry saw, start removing mortar from a wall, finish drywall, or do any work that involves exposure to crystalline silica, be sure you have reviewed and understand your employer's silica protection program. Know what types of engineering controls and PPE you will need to work safely with silica on your jobsite. Then make sure you use the controls and wear the PPE to protect your lungs. And if you wear a respirator for more than 29 days a year, get checked out by your doctor.

SAFETY REMINDER

Most work that creates silica dust also creates a lot of noise. Protect your hearing with earplugs or ear muffs.

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Back Safety

As a construction worker, your job requires that you move materials, work in awkward positions, and handle heavy tools throughout the day. Any of these activities can cause back pain. Lifting and carrying require strength and muscle, but they also require proper technique. If you lift and carry material the wrong way, you'll hurt your back.

Back injuries are the most common injuries in the workplace, causing one million disabling injuries each year. Many of these injuries are in the construction industry and more than half of these injuries result from lifting. Unlike other disabilities, back injuries are sometimes difficult to treat and may require lengthy and expensive rehabilitation. Whether you are lifting at home or at work, make an effort to take care of your back: warm up before lifting, lift properly, and use material handling equipment when you can.

Start each day with some stretches to warm up your muscles and flex your joints. Stretch your legs, arms, and back.

Always use proper lifting techniques: lift with your leg muscles instead of your back muscles, bend your knees, keep your back straight, and hold the load close to your body. Keep in mind that lifting loads heavier than about 50 pounds significantly increases the risk of injury.

Material handling devices are great back-savers. Use a hoist, pallet jack, or forklift to lift heavy objects. Use a two-wheel dolly (hand truck), a four-wheel cart, or a similar device to move loads around the site instead of carrying them. Put the load on the wheels, not on your back. Use dollies and carts whenever possible, but be sure to use them correctly and carefully so they don't tip over.

Here are a few more tips to prevent back injuries:

- **Be aware of your actions.** Avoid mindlessly snatching something up off the floor by using your back and not your legs.
- **Don't overreach.** Don't lift, hold, or carry objects with your arms extended. Don't lean over a counter or workbench to lift an object.
- **Don't strain your back.** Avoid picking up heavy objects. Ask for help or get a forklift if you can.
- **Rest when you need to.** Avoid overdoing it. Pace yourself and take occasional breaks so the muscles in your back have a chance to recover.

Some workers like to wear back belts. There isn't enough scientific evidence yet to say whether or not back belts prevent back injuries. However, if your doctor prescribed a back belt as part of your treatment after a back injury, be sure to follow his or her directions. Prescription or not, don't let a back belt give you a false sense of security.

Backs have a lot of moving parts. They're delicate and very hard to fix if they get damaged. Take care of your back and never lift more weight than you can handle.

SAFETY REMINDER

Q: When it comes to safety, who's got your back? A: You.

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GFCIs

A ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) is an electrical safety device that can prevent you from getting a shock or being electrocuted when you work with electricity, power tools, and electrical equipment.

GFCIs constantly compare the amount of current going to electrical equipment with the amount of current returning from that equipment. The current in a circuit should always be constant. If the "going to" and "returning from" currents aren't the same, that means current is going somewhere else. The worst case is to have that current going through you! When the GFCI detects a difference between the "going to" and "returning from" currents, it shuts off the circuit almost instantly.

Keep in mind that the human body's tolerance for electrical current is low—as little as 10 mA (milliamps) can kill you. GFCIs are designed to trip, or shut off the electricity, when there is a 4 mA to 6 mA imbalance, so they keep you from getting electrocuted. GFCIs can also prevent fires and damage to equipment. Bypassing or disabling a GFCI can quite literally be deadly.

Keep these GFCI tips in mind:

- Always test GFCIs before first use and at least once each month.
- Understand which circuits are protected by GFCIs and which are not.
- Use a GFCI-protected circuit anytime you're working in an area that is damp or wet.
- If you're using a portable generator, make sure that its outlet is protected by a GFCI.
- GFCIs work on tools and appliances that don't have ground prongs.

It can be annoying if a GFCI keeps tripping and interrupting your work, but remember that there is a reason and you need to find it. Here are some of the more common reasons that a GFCI will trip:

- using a very long extension cord
- using an extension cord that's too small (light gauge) for the load
- using an extension cord when it's still coiled up
- running inductive loads like bigger motors
- operating a malfunctioning or damaged tool
- using electricity in a wet area

GFCIs go a long way toward preventing electrocutions, but they can't protect you from carelessness and bad choices, like touching live wires, using a screwdriver to find out if an outlet has power, or touching an overhead power line. Electricity always deserves your respect, regardless of whether or not you're protected by a GFCI.

SAFETY REMINDER

Keep a portable GFCI in your tool bag so you can turn any receptacle into a protected receptacle before you plug in tools and start to work.

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