TOOLBOX TALK: NEW ON SITE

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Whoever is newest here, do not say anything, just think of one thing you were shown this week that you still do not really understand. Everybody else: you were that person once and somebody let you stay that way.

The talk

The rule is short and it is not optional. The employer shall instruct each employee in the recognition and avoidance of unsafe conditions, and in the regulations that apply to their work, to control or eliminate the hazards they are exposed to. Shall. Each employee. Not the ones who ask.

It goes further for specific things. Anybody handling poisons, caustics or other harmful substances has to be instructed in safe handling and made aware of the hazards, the personal hygiene and the protective measures. Anybody handling flammable liquids, gases or toxic materials has to be instructed too.

There is even a rule about the site itself. Where there are harmful plants or animals, and that means poison ivy, wasps, snakes and dogs as much as anything exotic, anybody who might be exposed gets told what the hazard is, how to avoid it and the first aid for it.

None of that happens by osmosis. A new person watching an experienced one work learns the shortcuts first, because the shortcuts are what they can see. They do not see the twenty years of judgment underneath, and they cannot tell which part of what you did was the skill and which part was the risk you have decided you are willing to take.

So the first morning has a shape. Where the toilets are, where the water is, where the first aid kit is, where the muster point is, what the site address is, who the foreman is, what the hand signals are, and what they must not touch until somebody shows them. That is fifteen minutes and it is the cheapest fifteen minutes on the job.

And the ask on everybody else is one sentence. If you are the experienced one, you are the training. Whatever you do in front of them is what they will do when you are not there, including the bit you would never do if the foreman were watching.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The newest person on this site, and who their go to is by name.

- The first aid kit, the water and the toilets, said out loud for anybody here under a week.

- One tool on this site that nobody should touch without being shown.

- The hand signals this crew uses, demonstrated, not described.

- The site address, read out by somebody who started this month.

- Any harmful plant, insect nest or animal anybody has seen on this site.

The rules that apply

- The employer shall instruct each employee in the recognition and avoidance of unsafe conditions and in the regulations applicable to their work environment, to control or eliminate any hazards or other exposure to illness or injury.

- Employees required to handle or use poisons, caustics and other harmful substances shall be instructed in safe handling and use, and made aware of the potential hazards, personal hygiene and personal protective measures required.

- In job site areas where harmful plants or animals are present, employees who may be exposed shall be instructed in the potential hazards, how to avoid injury, and the first aid to be used.

- Employees required to handle or use flammable liquids, gases or toxic materials shall be instructed in their safe handling and use and made aware of the specific requirements that apply.

- Fall protection training under 29 CFR 1926.503 is the seventh most cited standard in the country, which means the training itself is what inspectors find missing, not only the harness.

Ask the crew

- Who is the newest person here, and what have they not been shown yet?

- Name one thing on this site a new person would get wrong by copying you.

- What is the site address, and can the newest person here say it?

Close with this

Nobody arrives knowing. They only arrive good at hiding that they do not.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

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TOOLBOX TALK: THE EMERGENCY PLAN

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Somebody tell me the street address of this site. Not the name of it, the address, the way you would say it to a dispatcher. Take your time, because on the day nobody could.

The talk

The address is the first thing that fails. People know the site as the Miller job or the plaza, and the ambulance needs a number and a street, and sometimes a cross street and which gate to come in.

Second is who calls. If everybody assumes somebody else called, nobody called. On this site the rule is that the person with the casualty calls or names one person and tells them to call, by name, out loud.

Third is where we go. The muster point is a fixed spot, it is away from the building, it is not in the way of the fire trucks coming in, and it does not move because it is raining.

Fourth is the head count. The only reason we muster is to find out if anybody is missing, which means somebody has to have the list and somebody has to count. A crowd standing in a parking lot is not a head count.

If somebody is missing, that information goes to the fire department when they arrive and it goes to them fast. Nobody goes back inside to look. That is the part of this that gets people killed twice.

The written plan has to name the escape routes, who stays behind to shut down anything critical, how we account for everybody, who does rescue and medical, how fires get reported, and who to ask about all of it. If that plan exists and you have never seen it, then it does not exist today.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The muster point. Everybody look at it right now.

- The two ways out of the area you are working in today.

- Where the site address is posted, and read it out.

- The first aid kit, and who on this crew is trained.

- The gate the fire truck would come through, and what is parked in front of it.

- Who is holding the crew list today.

The rules that apply

- The plan is in writing and it covers escape procedures and route assignments, who stays to shut down critical operations, how everybody is accounted for after evacuation, rescue and medical duties, how fires and emergencies get reported, and who to contact about the plan.

- There is an employee alarm system, and if it is used for more than one purpose each purpose has a distinct signal.

- The site address, including the cross street and the gate, is posted where anybody can read it to a dispatcher.

- One named person calls 911. If nobody was named, the person with the casualty calls.

- The muster point is fixed, clear of the building and clear of the route emergency vehicles need.

- Nobody re-enters for a missing person. That information goes to the fire department on arrival.

Ask the crew

- What is this site's address and which gate do they come in?

- Where is the muster point and who counts heads there?

- If you found somebody down in the basement, who calls and what do you say first?

Close with this

The plan is worth exactly as much as the part of it you can say without reading it.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: COLD STRESS

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Everybody check what you are wearing. Cotton next to the skin, wet gloves, no hat? Then you are going to be worse at your job by ten o'clock, and that is before we talk about frostbite.

The talk

Three layers. A wicking layer next to the skin that is not cotton, an insulating layer in the middle, and a wind and water resistant shell. Cotton holds sweat against you and then you carry a wet layer all day, which is how a cold morning becomes hypothermia in the afternoon.

Wind chill is the number that matters, not the thermometer. Thirty degrees with a twenty mile an hour wind takes exposed skin down fast, and standing on a deck or up on a lift is where the wind actually is.

Wet is worse than cold. Wet gloves, wet boots, snow down a collar, or sweat from working hard in a shell you never opened. Bring a spare set of gloves and socks and change them when they get wet, not at the end of the day.

Know the signs. Frostbite starts as numbness with white or grayish yellow skin that feels firm or waxy, usually fingers, toes, nose and ears. Do not rub it. Get inside, warm it gradually with body heat or warm not hot water, and get medical attention.

Hypothermia starts with uncontrollable shivering, then clumsiness, slurred speech and confusion. When the shivering stops but the person is still cold, it is getting worse, not better. That is a 911 call. Get them into a warm dry place, off wet clothes, into blankets, warm drinks if they are alert.

And the part that causes most winter injuries: ice. Black ice on plywood, frost on steel, snow hiding an opening, a ladder base on ice. Salt or sand the routes, sweep the deck before anybody carries anything across it, and add extra time to everything.

Point at these before anybody starts

- What everybody is wearing next to the skin, and whether any of it is cotton

- Spare gloves, socks and hats in the truck, and who does not have any

- The wind chill for this morning and this afternoon

- Where the warm up area is and how often people are getting to it

- Ice and frost on decks, stairs, ladders, scaffolds and the walking routes

- Anybody who is already shivering, and how long they have been out

The rules that apply

- Layer properly: a non cotton wicking base, an insulating middle layer and a wind and water resistant shell.

- Change out of wet gloves, socks and clothing immediately. Wet clothing pulls heat out of the body far faster than cold air.

- Take scheduled warm up breaks in a heated space, more often as wind chill drops.

- Frostbite: do not rub the area, warm it gradually, get medical attention.

- Hypothermia with confusion or shivering that has stopped is a 911 call. Warm the person and keep them awake and dry.

- Clear, salt or sand every walking route, ladder base and work platform before work starts.

Ask the crew

- Who is working in the wind today, up high or out in the open?

- Who does not have a spare pair of gloves with them right now?

- Where is the ice on this site that somebody is going to find the hard way?

Close with this

Dry layers, warm up breaks, salt on the routes. If somebody stops shivering and starts making no sense, call 911.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

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TOOLBOX TALK: SITE LIGHTING

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

It gets dark at half four soon. Who here knows what the legal minimum light level is for the work we do, and in what unit?

The talk

There is a table in the regulations, Table D-3, and it sets minimum illumination intensities in foot candles. Construction areas, ramps, runways, corridors, offices, shops and storage areas shall be lighted to not less than those minimums while any work is in progress. While any work is in progress, which includes the last hour when people are packing up.

The numbers are low and worth hearing so nobody imagines they are being generous. General construction area lighting: 5 foot candles. General construction areas, concrete placement, excavation and waste areas, access ways, active storage areas, loading platforms, refueling and field maintenance areas: 3.

Indoors, warehouses, corridors, hallways and exitways: 5. Tunnels, shafts and general underground work areas: 5, and the exception, a minimum of 10 foot candles at tunnel and shaft heading during drilling, mucking and scaling.

General construction plant and shops, meaning batch plants, screening plants, mechanical and electrical equipment rooms, carpenter shops, rigging lofts, active store rooms, mess halls and indoor toilets and workrooms: 10. First aid stations, infirmaries and offices: 30.

Five for the general area and thirty for the office is the comparison to sit with. The place where somebody does paperwork is required to be six times brighter than the place where somebody carries block down a ramp, and neither of those is a lot of light.

For anything not in that table the standard points at the American National Standard A11.1-1965, R1970, Practice for Industrial Lighting, for recommended values. That is the fallback, and on a real job it is the argument for asking rather than guessing.

So what this means at four in the afternoon in November. Task lighting at the face of the work, not one flood on a pole throwing everybody's shadow into their own cut. Light on the access route, the ramp and the stairs, which is where people get hurt walking out, not where they get hurt working.

And the lighting itself is temporary electrical equipment, which puts it under everything in the cords and GFCI talk. Every string, every festoon, every task light: guarded bulbs, no damaged insulation, kept up out of standing water,

and on ground fault protection like anything else on a cord here.

Point at these before anybody starts

- Whether there is any light at the actual face of the work or just overhead.

- The access route, stairs and ramps after dark, walked end to end.

- Every temporary light on a cord: guard on, cable sound, plug intact.

- Glare and shadow. Enough light aimed wrong is still not enough light.

- The first aid station and the office, which are the two places with a real number on them.

- What happens when the generator or the site power goes off, and who has a torch.

The rules that apply

- Construction areas, ramps, runways, corridors, offices, shops and storage areas shall be lighted to not less than the minimum illumination intensities listed in Table D-3 while any work is in progress.

- Table D-3 minimums in foot candles: 5 for general construction area lighting; 3 for general construction areas, concrete placement, excavation and waste areas, access ways, active storage areas, loading platforms, refueling and field maintenance areas; 5 indoors for warehouses, corridors, hallways and exitways.

- Tunnels, shafts and general underground work areas: 5 foot candles, with a minimum of 10 required at tunnel and shaft heading during drilling, mucking and scaling.

- General construction plant and shops: 10 foot candles. First aid stations, infirmaries and offices: 30 foot candles.

- For areas or operations not covered by Table D-3, refer to American National Standard A11.1-1965, R1970, Practice for Industrial Lighting, for recommended values of illumination.

Ask the crew

- What is the minimum for a general construction area, and what is it for the office?

- Which area in the table has to be brighter than all the others, and why would that be?

- If it goes dark on the way out tonight, what is the route and is it lit?

Close with this

Nobody gets hurt by the dark. They get hurt by the thing in it that they did not see in time.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Without turning around, point at the nearest fire extinguisher. Anybody who has to look for it has just told us how this talk is going to go.

The talk

There is a distance rule and most sites break it. From any point in the protected area, the walk to the nearest extinguisher cannot be more than a hundred feet.

There is a coverage rule too. At least one extinguisher rated 2A for every three thousand square feet of protected building area, and at least one on every floor, with one next to the stairway in a multistory building.

Where you are using more than five gallons of flammable liquid or five pounds of flammable gas, there has to be an extinguisher rated at least 10B within fifty feet of it. That is the gas cans and the propane, not the building.

Learn the word PASS and you have the whole technique. Pull the pin, aim at the base of the fire, squeeze the handle, sweep side to side. Aiming at the flames does nothing, because the flames are not what is burning.

The harder part is knowing when not to. If the fire is bigger than you are, if it is between you and the way out, if it is spreading faster than you are working, or if you are on your own, you leave. You do not get a second decision.

An extinguisher that has been used is empty even if it still feels heavy, and it does not go back on the hook. Firefighting equipment gets inspected and kept working, and anything defective is replaced immediately, not at the end of the job.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The nearest extinguisher. Walk to it and count the steps.

- The gauge on it, and whether the needle is in the green.

- The pin and the seal, and whether either has been disturbed.

- The fuel cans and propane on this site, and the extinguisher within fifty feet of them.

- The way out of this floor, and whether an extinguisher sits between you and it.

- The stairway, and the extinguisher that is supposed to be next to it.

The rules that apply

- An extinguisher rated at least 2A for every 3,000 square feet of protected building area, or major fraction of it.

- The travel distance from any point in the protected area to the nearest extinguisher cannot exceed 100 feet.

- One or more extinguishers rated at least 2A on every floor, and in a multistory building at least one located next to the stairway.

- An extinguisher rated at least 10B within 50 feet of anywhere more than 5 gallons of flammable or combustible liquid, or 5 pounds of flammable gas, is in use. Vehicle fuel tanks do not count.

- All firefighting equipment is inspected periodically and kept in operating condition, and defective equipment is replaced immediately.

- Carbon tetrachloride and other toxic vaporizing liquid extinguishers are prohibited on the site.

Ask the crew

- How many steps to the nearest extinguisher from where you work today?

- What does PASS stand for?

- Name one situation today where you would walk away instead of fighting it.

Close with this

Ten seconds of extinguisher, or a whole building. Decide which one you are dealing with before you pick it up.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: GAS CYLINDERS

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Look at the cylinders on this site. How many are standing up and chained? How many have caps on? Do not answer, just count, because that is the score.

The talk

Cylinders shall be secured in an upright position at all times, except if necessary for short periods while they are actually being hoisted or carried. At all times. That includes the one leaning against the wall of the container that somebody will stand up later.

The cap is not packaging. Valve protection caps shall be in place and secured, and regulators come off and caps go on before a cylinder is moved, unless it is firmly secured on a carrier made for the job. The cap exists because the valve is the weak point and the valve is what turns a cylinder into a missile.

And the cap is not a handle. Valve protection caps shall not be used for lifting cylinders from one vertical position to another. Nor are bars to be used under valves or caps to pry a frozen cylinder loose. Warm water, not boiling, is what the standard says to use.

Moving them: tilt and roll on the bottom edge. They shall not be intentionally dropped, struck or allowed to strike each other violently. If they are hoisted they go on a cradle, a slingboard or a pallet, never a magnet and never a choker sling. On a powered vehicle they are secured vertical.

Storage is the one that gets cited. Oxygen cylinders in storage shall be separated from fuel gas cylinders or combustible materials, especially oil or grease, by a minimum of 20 feet, or by a noncombustible barrier at least 5 feet high with a fire resistance rating of at least half an hour. Twenty feet or a real wall. Not the corner of the shed.

Inside a building they go in a well protected, well ventilated, dry place at least 20 feet from highly combustible material, away from elevators, stairs and gangways, where nothing can knock them over. And they shall not be kept in unventilated enclosures such as lockers and cupboards, which is exactly where a van box puts them.

In use: keep them far enough from the welding or cutting that sparks, hot slag or flame cannot reach them, or put a fire resistant shield up. Keep them out of any electrical circuit, and never strike an arc against a cylinder. Fuel gas cylinders stand valve end up. And no cylinder of oxygen, acetylene or any fuel gas goes into a confined space, ever.

Cracking a valve before fitting the regulator is a real procedure with a real position. Open it slightly and close it immediately, standing to one side of the outlet and not in front of it, and never where the gas could reach sparks or flame. Then open slowly, and on a fuel gas cylinder no more than one and a half turns so it can be shut fast.

When work is finished, when a cylinder is empty, or whenever a cylinder is moved, the valve is closed. Empty is not a state that makes a cylinder safe. It makes it lighter, which is worse.

Point at these before anybody starts

- Every cylinder on this site: upright, secured, cap on or regulator fitted.

- The distance between the oxygen and the fuel gas in storage. Pace it out.

- Any cylinder inside a van box, locker or cupboard with no ventilation.

- Any cylinder close enough to the cutting that slag could reach it.

- The wrench for the fuel gas valve, and whether it is on the stem where it belongs.

- Any cylinder being used as a roller, a prop or a support for something.

The rules that apply

- Compressed gas cylinders shall be secured in an upright position at all times except, if necessary, for short periods while actually being hoisted or carried.

- Valve protection caps shall be in place and secured, shall not be used for lifting, and regulators shall be removed with caps fitted before cylinders are moved unless firmly secured on a special carrier.

- Oxygen cylinders in storage shall be separated from fuel gas cylinders or combustible materials, especially oil or grease, by at least 20 feet or by a noncombustible barrier at least 5 feet high with a fire resistance rating of at least half an hour.

- Cylinders shall not be kept in unventilated enclosures such as lockers and cupboards, and shall be stored at least 20 feet from highly combustible materials.

- Cylinders containing oxygen or acetylene or other fuel gas shall not be taken into confined spaces, and shall be placed where they cannot become part of an electrical circuit.

- When work is finished, when cylinders are empty, or when cylinders are moved at any time, the cylinder valve shall be closed. No damaged or defective cylinder shall be used.

Ask the crew

- How far apart do oxygen and fuel gas have to be in storage, and what else would do?

- What are the two things a valve cap must never be used for?

- Can a cylinder go into a confined space if the work is quick?

Close with this

Upright, capped, chained, twenty feet. Four things, and one of them is wrong on most sites right now.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

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TOOLBOX TALK: RESPIRATORY PROTECTION

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Everybody wearing a respirator today, put it on now and do a seal check in front of me. If you have never been shown how, say so, because that is the point of this.

The talk

A tight fitting respirator works by sealing to skin. Everything else about it, the cartridges, the rating, the price, is downstream of that one seal.

Which is why facial hair between the sealing surface and the face is not allowed. Not trimmed short, not most of the way. If the hair crosses the seal, that respirator does not work and the standard says it is not to be worn.

You do a user seal check every single time you put it on. Cover the cartridges and breathe in, the facepiece should pull in and hold. Cover the exhale valve and breathe out gently, it should push out slightly without leaking round the edge.

A seal check is not a fit test. A fit test is done in advance, with equipment, to prove that this size and model fits this face, and it is what tells you which respirator to be issued in the first place.

Before any of that, there is a medical evaluation. Wearing a respirator is work for your heart and lungs, and the evaluation happens before you are fit tested or put to work in one. It is provided at no cost to you, and so is the respirator and the training.

Last thing, and it is the one that catches people. A paper dust mask is not a respirator for vapors, fumes or gases. It filters particles. Solvent, paint, adhesive and exhaust go straight through it, and the smell you notice after twenty minutes is the proof.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The respirator you have, and the rating printed on it.

- The cartridges, and the date somebody wrote on them.

- The straps, and whether the rubber has gone stiff or shiny.

- The exhale valve, and whether it is clean and sitting flat.

- Where it gets stored between shifts, and whether that is a bag or a dusty gang box.

- The job today that produces vapor rather than dust, and who is on it.

The rules that apply

- Employees with facial hair that crosses the sealing surface, or any condition that interferes with the seal or valve function, are not permitted to wear a tight fitting respirator.

- A user seal check is done every time a tight fitting respirator is put on, using the manufacturer procedure or the one in the standard.

- Glasses, goggles and other PPE must be worn so they do not interfere with the face to facepiece seal.

- A medical evaluation is provided before an employee is fit tested or required to use a respirator at work.

- Tight fitting respirators are fit tested, qualitatively or quantitatively, before use.

- Respirators, training and medical evaluations are provided at no cost to the employee.

Ask the crew

- Show me a negative pressure seal check right now.

- What is the difference between a fit test and a seal check?

- Which job on this site needs a cartridge rather than a dust mask?

Close with this

If it leaks, you are not protected, and you will not feel the leak. That is the whole reason for the check.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

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TOOLBOX TALK: HAZARD COMMUNICATION

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Somebody tell me where the safety data sheets are on this job. Not in theory. If a man swallowed something out of that unmarked bottle right now, how many minutes before we had the sheet in our hands?

The talk

For construction the standard is 1926.59, and it is one sentence long: the requirements applicable to construction work are identical to those at 1910.1200. So everything below is the same rule the whole country works to, and it has been for decades.

A shipped container carries six things. Product identifier, signal word, hazard statement, pictogram, precautionary statement, and the name, US address and US telephone number of the manufacturer, importer or other responsible party. Six. If a drum on this site is missing any of them, it arrived wrong and somebody should have said.

The signal word is only ever one of two: Danger for the more severe hazard, Warning for the less. It is worth knowing that because people read the picture and skip the word, and the word is the part that was classified.

Every container in the workplace has to be labeled, tagged or marked, either with the full shipped label information or at minimum the product identifier plus words or pictures giving general information about the hazards. The one exception is a portable container that somebody fills from a labeled container and uses themselves within that shift. The moment it is left for the next man it is not exempt any more.

Safety data sheets come in sixteen sections and they are always in the same order, which is the point of them. Section 2 is the hazards, Section 4 is first aid, Section 7 is handling and storage, Section 8 is exposure controls and PPE. Somebody who knows only those four numbers can work a sheet for a chemical they have never seen.

The sheets have to be in the workplace and readily accessible during each shift to employees in their work area. Electronic access is allowed as long as it creates no barrier to immediate access, and a login nobody on the crew has is a barrier. Where the crew moves between sites in a shift, the sheets may live at the primary facility, but the employer must ensure employees can immediately obtain the information in an emergency.

Training is owed at the time of initial assignment and again whenever a new chemical hazard nobody has been trained on turns up in the work area. That second half is the one that gets missed, because the new product arrives on a Tuesday and nobody treats a delivery as a training trigger.

And the honest reason this matters on a construction site more than in a plant: the chemicals change every job. Adhesive, sealant, curing compound, form release, solvent, muriatic acid for the wash down. Nobody is going to memorise them. They just have to know the label tells them and where the sheet is.

Point at these before anybody starts

- Every unlabeled bottle, can or bucket on this site. There is always at least one.

- Where the safety data sheets live, said out loud, and whether anybody can get at them now.

- The last chemical that arrived on this job, and whether anybody was told about it.

- One label on site, read aloud: signal word, hazard statement, pictogram.

- Any container something has been decanted into and left.

- The eyewash, and how far it is from where the chemicals are used.

The rules that apply

- The requirements applicable to construction work under 1926.59 are identical to those set forth at 1910.1200.

- A shipped label carries the product identifier, signal word, hazard statement, pictogram, precautionary statement, and the name, US address and US telephone number of the responsible party.

- Each container of hazardous chemicals in the workplace shall be labeled, tagged or marked with either the shipped label information or the product identifier plus words or pictures giving general hazard information.

- Portable containers are exempt from labeling only where a chemical is transferred from a labeled container and is intended only for the immediate use of the employee who makes the transfer.

- The employer shall maintain safety data sheets in the workplace and ensure they are readily accessible during each work shift to employees in their work areas, with no barrier to immediate access.

- Training is required at the time of initial assignment and whenever a new chemical hazard the employees have not previously been trained about is introduced into their work area.

Ask the crew

- Where are the safety data sheets, and could you have one open in two minutes?

- Which section of a data sheet is first aid, and which one is PPE?

- Name one container on this site right now that is not labeled.

Close with this

Second most cited standard in the country, and the fix is a marker pen and knowing where the binder is.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

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TOOLBOX TALK: HOUSEKEEPING

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Look at the floor where you are standing. If you had to walk backward carrying a sheet of plywood right now, what would you go over?

The talk

Slips, trips and falls on the same level are the injuries nobody respects, and they are the ones that fill up the log. A twisted knee, a broken wrist, a head on a stud. All of them from something on the floor that was going to be picked up later.

The reason it is worse in construction is that everybody is carrying something. You cannot see your feet with a sheet of drywall in your hands, so the floor has to be clear before you start, not after you trip.

Nails and screws in scrap. Every piece of pulled trim, every offcut of sheathing and every broken pallet is a puncture waiting to happen. Bend them over or pull them, and get scrap into a container the same day, not into a pile in the corner.

Cords and hoses are the trip hazard we create ourselves. Run them along walls and around the perimeter, not across doorways and walking routes, hang them where you can, and pull them back when the tool is done.

Combustibles are the other half of housekeeping. Sawdust, cardboard, rags with finish on them, plastic wrap and foam offcuts. A pile of that next to a heater, a light or hot work is an actual fire, and rags with oil based finish can heat up on their own and ignite without any source at all. Those go in a sealed metal can.

The rule that works is clean as you go. Fifteen minutes at the end of the day, every day, beats a half day cleanup on Friday, and it means Monday starts on a floor you can walk across.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The walking routes: from the door to the work, and from the work to the saw

- Cords and hoses lying across any route people use

- Scrap with nails and screws in it, and where the container is

- Sawdust, cardboard and packaging, especially near heaters and lights

- Any rags with oil based finish on them and what they are being stored in

- Stairs and landings, which are where debris does the most damage

The rules that apply

- Clear scrap, debris and packaging at regular intervals during the shift, not only at the end.

- Keep walkways, stairs, landings and exits clear at all times.

- Bend over or pull nails and screws in scrap lumber the moment it comes off.

- Route cords and hoses along walls and overhead, never across doorways or walking routes.

- Store combustible scrap in covered containers and rags with oil based finish in sealed metal cans.

- Clean as you go, and finish the shift with the floor walkable.

Ask the crew

- What is on this floor right now that somebody is going to go over today?

- Where does the scrap actually go on this job, and does everybody know?

- Who is doing the last fifteen minutes today?

Close with this

Clear routes, cords out of the way, scrap in the container, nails bent over. Fifteen minutes at the end of every day.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: LADDER SAFETY

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Everybody look at the ladder you were about to use. We are going to spend five minutes on it, because a ladder is the tool on this job most likely to hurt one of us this year.

The talk

Ladder falls are not usually dramatic. Most of them are six to ten feet, onto a driveway or a subfloor, and they end in a broken wrist, a broken heel or a head injury. The fall is short. The landing is what does the damage.

Almost every ladder fall comes down to one of four things. The base slid out. The top moved sideways. The person reached too far and took the ladder with them. Or they were carrying something and had one hand for the ladder instead of two.

The angle fixes the first one. One foot out from the wall for every four feet of height. If the ladder is sixteen feet to the contact point, the feet are four feet out. Too steep and it tips back on you. Too shallow and the base walks out from under you, which is the one that hurts.

The three foot extension fixes the second one. If you are stepping off onto a roof or a landing, the side rails have to go three feet past it, and the ladder has to be tied off at the top. Nobody has ever fallen off a ladder that was tied at the top and footed at the bottom.

The third one is the one we all do. You are two feet short of the last screw and moving the ladder means climbing down, moving it, climbing up. So you lean. Keep your belt buckle inside the side rails. The moment it goes outside, your weight is outside the base and the ladder is coming with you.

The fourth one is three points of contact. Two hands and a foot, or two feet and a hand, at all times. That means the tool goes up in a bag, on a hoist, or in a pocket. Not in your hand while you climb.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The feet of every ladder on site: are they on solid, level ground, and are the shoes flat and not worn smooth

- The angle on the tallest ladder here, measured one out for every four up

- The top of any ladder used for access, three feet above the landing and tied off

- The rails and rungs for cracks, bends, missing bolts and anything painted over

- The top cap and top step of every stepladder on site, which nobody stands on

- The duty rating sticker, and whether it covers the person plus tools plus material

The rules that apply

- A ladder used to get to an upper level must extend at least 3 feet above the landing and be secured at the top.

- Set a straight or extension ladder at about a 4 to 1 angle: 1 foot of base out for every 4 feet of working length.

- Keep three points of contact going up and down. Carry tools in a bag or hoist them, never in a hand.

- Do not stand on the top cap or the top step of a stepladder, and do not use a closed stepladder as a straight ladder.

- Ladders with a broken rung, a bent rail or a missing foot are tagged and taken off the job the same day, not leaned in the corner.

- Never place a ladder in front of a door that opens toward it unless the door is blocked, locked or guarded.

Ask the crew

- Which ladder on this site is the one you least like using, and why is it still here?

- Where are we going to tie off the ladder at the top today, and who is doing it?

- What are we carrying up today that should be going up in a bag instead of a hand?

Close with this

Before anybody climbs today: feet solid, angle right, tied at the top if you are stepping off it, and both hands free.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: SCAFFOLD SAFETY

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Everybody face the scaffold. Before anybody steps on it today, one person here is responsible for having looked at it. Who is that person, and when did they look?

The talk

Scaffolds get built on Monday by whoever was free and used for three weeks by everybody. That is the whole problem. The person standing on it on Thursday has no idea what the ground under the base plates looked like when it went up.

Start at the bottom. Base plates on mud sills, on ground that is compacted and level. Not on a block, not on a bucket, not on a piece of scrap plywood over soft fill. A scaffold fails from the bottom up, and it fails all at once.

Planking is the second thing. The platform is fully planked between the front upright and the guardrail. Not mostly planked. A gap you can step through is a fall, and the plank you are standing on needs to overhang its support by at least six inches and no more than twelve, or it becomes a lever.

Above ten feet you need guardrails: a top rail, a mid rail and toeboards where anybody works or passes below. The toeboard is not decoration. A dropped hammer from twenty feet is a fatality if it lands on a hard hat wrong.

Height to base ratio is four to one. Once the scaffold is four times taller than its narrowest base dimension, it has to be tied to the structure or braced. A rolling tower that is tall and narrow is the most dangerous thing on a residential site, especially with somebody still standing on it while it gets moved, which nobody does on this job.

And the access. You climb the ladder or the built in stair, not the frame end. The cross braces are not a ladder and they were never designed as one.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The base plates and mud sills, all four corners, on firm level ground

- The platform, fully planked, with no gap you could put a boot through

- Plank overhang at each end, between six and twelve inches past the support

- The guardrails and toeboards on every open side above ten feet

- The tie ins, and the height to base ratio on the tallest tower here

- The access ladder or stair, and the fact that nobody climbs the cross braces

The rules that apply

- Scaffolds are erected, moved, altered and dismantled only under the supervision of a competent person.

- A competent person inspects the scaffold before each work shift and after anything that could affect it, such as weather or a bump from equipment.

- Platforms are fully planked. Each plank overhangs its support by at least 6 inches and not more than 12 unless it is cleated or restrained.

- Guardrails on all open sides above 10 feet, with toeboards wherever anybody works or passes underneath.

- Tie, guy or brace the scaffold once the height is more than four times the minimum base dimension.

- Nobody rides a rolling scaffold while it is being moved, and the casters are locked before anybody steps on.

Ask the crew

- Who is our competent person for this scaffold, and when was it last looked at?

- What changed on this scaffold since it went up? Anything moved, removed or borrowed?

- Is there anybody working below us today, and do the toeboards cover them?

Close with this

Nobody gets on this scaffold today until it has been walked, bottom to top, by the person responsible for it.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: POWER TOOL SAFETY

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Everybody put your most used tool on the ground in front of you. We are looking at guards, cords and switches, and anything that fails comes off this job today.

The talk

Guards come off for one reason: they are in the way. And they are in the way because the tool is being used for something it was not designed for, or the material is not supported properly. Fix the setup and the guard stops being a problem.

A guard that has been wired, taped or zip tied back is not a modified tool, it is a defective one. Same with a trigger held on with tape and a dead man switch defeated with a cable tie. That tool goes in the truck.

The right tool matters more than people admit. A grinder is not a cutoff saw. A circular saw is not a demo tool. A screwdriver is not a chisel and a chisel is not a pry bar. Most hand injuries come from a tool being forced into a job it cannot do, slipping, and taking a hand with it.

Kickback and pinch are the two things to understand. Kickback is the blade grabbing and throwing the tool back at you, usually because the cut closed on the blade or the material moved. Pinch is the same event in the material. The answer to both is support the work properly, let the tool reach speed, and never stand in line with the cut.

Cords and batteries. Cords get inspected end to end, batteries get stored out of the sun and off the concrete in winter, and a battery pack that is swollen, dropped hard or hot to the touch goes out of service, not back in the charger.

And the small stuff that costs fingers. Unplug or remove the battery before changing a blade or a bit. Not trigger locked, not set down carefully. Disconnected. Every year somebody loses part of a hand to a tool they were sure was off.

Point at these before anybody starts

- Every guard on site: present, moving freely and not tied back

- Triggers and dead man switches, none of them taped or defeated

- Cords and plugs end to end, ground pins present

- Blades and bits: sharp, correct for the material, rated for the tool speed

- How the material is being supported for the cut people are about to make

- Battery packs, checking for swelling, damage and heat

The rules that apply

- Guards stay on and stay functional. A tool with a defeated guard or switch is removed from service the same day.

- Disconnect the power or remove the battery before changing blades, bits or accessories, or making any adjustment.

- Use the tool the manufacturer built for the job, at the rated speed, with an accessory rated for at least that speed.

- Support the workpiece so the cut cannot close on the blade, and never stand in line with the cut or the wheel.

- Inspect cords, plugs and housings before use, and never carry or lower a tool by its cord or hose.

- Eye protection every time, hearing protection for anything loud, and no loose sleeves, gloves or jewelry near a rotating tool.

Ask the crew

- Which tool on this job has a guard that has been in the way all week?

- What is the worst near miss you have had with a power tool, and what caused it?

- Who is changing a blade today, and how are they making sure the tool is dead first?

Close with this

Guards on, power off before you change anything, and the right tool for the cut. Anything defective goes in the truck now.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: EXTENSION CORDS AND GFCI

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Hold up the cord you are about to plug in. We are going to look at every one of them, end to end, before anything gets energized today.

The talk

Electrocution is one of the four hazards that kill the most construction workers, and on a residential job it is almost never the panel. It is a cord with a nicked jacket lying in a puddle, or a tool with a ground pin somebody snapped off six months ago.

GFCI is the thing that actually saves you. It is watching for current leaving on a path it should not take, which is what happens when that path is you. It trips in a fraction of a second at a current small enough not to stop your heart.

On a construction site, every 125 volt, single phase, 15, 20 and 30 amp receptacle outlet that is not part of the permanent wiring of the building has to be GFCI protected. The alternative is a written assured equipment grounding conductor program, with somebody actually inspecting and tagging tools and cords on a schedule. Almost nobody runs that program properly, so in practice the answer is GFCI everything.

Test it. The test button on the GFCI is not decoration, and a GFCI that does not trip when you press it is a box that is lying to you. Test at the start of every shift and after anything gets wet.

Now the cords themselves. Three wire, hard service or extra hard service rating, sized for the load and the length. A long thin cord on a table saw is a voltage drop that overheats the motor and the cord at the same time. No splices, no tape repairs, no exposed conductors, no missing ground pin.

And keep them out of the way and out of the water. Not across a doorway, not under a door, not through a puddle, not run through standing water where a nick you cannot see becomes a path to ground through anybody who touches the tool.

Point at these before anybody starts

- Every cord end on site: three prongs, ground pin present, no cracked housing

- The jacket along its whole length, looking for nicks, cuts and tape repairs

- Where cords are lying: puddles, doorways, traffic routes, across sharp edges

- The GFCI, and one of us pressing the test button in front of everybody

- The cord gauge against the tool it is feeding and the distance it is running

- Any tool with a ground pin missing, which comes off the job right now

The rules that apply

- All 125 volt, 15, 20 and 30 amp receptacles not part of the permanent wiring need GFCI protection, or a documented assured equipment grounding conductor program.

- Test GFCI devices with the test button at the start of each shift and after any exposure to water.

- Extension cords on site are three wire, rated hard service or extra hard service, and never spliced or taped.

- A cord with a damaged jacket, a bent or missing ground pin or a cracked end is removed from service, not wrapped in tape.

- Do not run cords through doorways, windows, standing water or across walking routes where they will be crushed.

- Never carry a tool by its cord or yank the cord to unplug it.

Ask the crew

- Has anybody pressed the test button on a GFCI on this job this week?

- Which cord on this site is the one we all know about and keep using anyway?

- What is the longest cord run here, and is it heavy enough for the tool on the end of it?

Close with this

Every cord inspected end to end, every GFCI tested, and anything damaged goes in the truck, not back in the pile.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: UNDERGROUND UTILITIES

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Before that machine moves, somebody show me the locate marks and tell me how old they are. If nobody can, we are not digging this morning.

The talk

The rule starts before the excavation is opened. The estimated location of every sewer, telephone, fuel, electric and water line that could reasonably be in the way has to be worked out first.

Then the utility owners get contacted within the local response time, told what is being done, and asked to come and mark it. That is the 811 call in most of the country and it is a requirement, not a courtesy.

If they cannot respond within twenty four hours, or cannot pin down the exact position, you may proceed, but only with caution and only using detection equipment or another acceptable means of locating. Proceeding because the phone did not get answered is not that.

Marks are estimates. They tell you a line is somewhere near, not that it is exactly there. As the dig approaches the marked location, the exact position has to be found by safe means, which in practice means hand digging or vacuum excavation in the tolerance zone.

Once a line is exposed and the trench is open, it does not just sit there. It has to be supported, protected or removed while the excavation is open, because an unsupported pipe sagging across a trench is a pipe about to break over somebody's head.

And know the smell test is worthless for some of these. A struck fiber is expensive. A struck electric service can kill the operator through the machine. A struck gas line can take out the street, and by then it is not a jobsite problem any more.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The locate marks on the ground, and the date on them.

- The colors, and what each one means on this site.

- Where the marks stop, and whether that is because nothing is there.

- The tolerance zone around each mark that has to be hand dug.

- Any line already exposed in the trench, and what is holding it up.

- The gas meter or riser, and where the service runs from it.

The rules that apply

- The estimated location of all underground installations is determined before the excavation is opened.

- Utility owners are contacted within the local response time, told about the work, and asked to establish the location of their lines before digging starts.

- If they cannot respond within 24 hours, or cannot establish exact locations, work may proceed only with caution and with detection equipment or other acceptable means in use.

- As the excavation approaches an estimated location, the exact location is determined by safe and acceptable means, which means hand digging or vacuum excavation, not the bucket.

- While the excavation is open, exposed installations are protected, supported or removed as needed to keep people safe.

- A struck line stops the job. Nobody re-enters the excavation until the owner of that utility has been called and has said it is safe.

Ask the crew

- What do the marks on this ground say is under us?

- How wide is the hand dig zone either side of a mark?

- If the bucket clips a gas line, what is the first thing you do?

Close with this

One phone call, made days ago, is what stands between this bucket and the evening news.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: TRENCHING AND EXCAVATION

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Nobody goes in the trench today until we have all heard this and the competent person has said it is inspected. If the box is not in, the trench is not open.

The talk

Soil is heavy. One cubic yard runs around three thousand pounds, and a wall failure drops several cubic yards at once. Being buried to the chest is enough to stop you breathing, because you cannot expand your ribs against that weight.

The trigger is five feet. Any excavation five feet or deeper needs a protective system: sloping the walls back, benching, shoring, or a trench box. The only exception is an excavation entirely in stable rock, which is rarer than people claim.

Under five feet still needs a competent person to look at it and decide. A four foot trench in wet, previously disturbed or sandy soil can and does collapse. Depth is not the only variable, and previously disturbed ground is the one that catches crews, because it is where the last utility went in.

The spoil pile goes at least two feet back from the edge, and so does everything else. Material, tools, the excavator tracks, the pipe waiting to go in. Weight near the edge is a surcharge load, and it is what turns a stable wall into a failing one.

Access. Any trench four feet or deeper needs a ladder, ramp or steps within twenty five feet of lateral travel from any worker in it. Climbing the shoring or the trench box is not access.

And the invisible hazard: air. Excavations can hold low oxygen, hydrogen sulfide from a sewer, or vehicle exhaust settling into the low spot. Anything four feet or deeper where a hazardous atmosphere could exist gets tested before entry, not after somebody feels strange.

One more thing that does not depend on depth: call 811 before you dig, and hand dig within the tolerance zone of the marks. Striking a gas line or a live service is the other way this work kills people.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The depth of today's excavation, measured, not guessed

- The protective system: slope angle, bench, shoring or box, and who checked it

- The spoil pile and the equipment position, at least two feet back from the edge

- The ladder, its position and whether it is within 25 feet of everybody in the trench

- The 811 locate marks and where we are hand digging

- Water in the bottom, cracks along the top edge, and any previously disturbed ground

The rules that apply

- Excavations 5 feet deep or more need sloping, benching, shoring or shielding unless they are entirely in stable rock.

- A competent person inspects the excavation daily, before each shift, and again after rain or any change in conditions.

- Keep spoil, material and equipment at least 2 feet from the edge.

- Trenches 4 feet or deeper need a ladder, ramp or steps within 25 feet of lateral travel.

- Test the atmosphere before entering any excavation 4 feet or deeper where a hazardous atmosphere could exist.

- Call 811 before digging and hand dig within the tolerance zone around marked utilities.

Ask the crew

- How deep is this trench, and who measured it?

- Who is our competent person, and when did they last walk this excavation?

- If a wall lets go while somebody is in there, what is the first thing we do? Nobody jumps in after them.

Close with this

Five feet means a system, every time. Two feet back from the edge. Ladder within twenty five feet. Inspected today.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: WORKING AROUND HEAVY EQUIPMENT

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Everybody look at the excavator. Now stand where you would be if you were doing your normal job. How many of you are inside the tail swing?

The talk

Every machine on this site has a blind spot, and on most of them it is directly behind and directly to the right. That is not carelessness. It is where the cab, the engine and the mirrors put it.

The operator is also concentrating on a bucket, which means his head is turned away from everywhere else. Assuming he has seen you is the single most common mistake made around equipment.

So you never walk into a machine's working area without making eye contact first, and you wait for the operator to acknowledge you. Not a wave in his direction. He looks at you and he tells you to come.

Tail swing is the other one. An excavator's counterweight comes round further than people expect and it comes round at head height. There is no warning noise and there is nothing you can do once it is moving.

When a machine is parked, the brake goes on. On a slope the wheels get chocked as well. A machine that rolls while nobody is in it is not an accident, it is a step somebody skipped.

Nobody works under a bucket, a blade or a raised body that is held up by hydraulics. Hydraulics leak. If it has to stay up while somebody is underneath, it gets blocked or cribbed so that it is sitting on steel, not on pressure.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The blind spot on the machine nearest you, from where the operator actually sits.

- The tail swing arc, and what is inside it right now.

- The parking brake, and the chocks, and where the chocks are stored.

- Where you would stand to be seen by that operator before walking in.

- The travel route the machines are using today, and where it crosses where people walk.

- Any machine parked on a slope, and whether it is chocked.

The rules that apply

- Whenever equipment is parked the parking brake is set. Equipment parked on an incline has the wheels chocked and the parking brake set.

- Blades, buckets and dump bodies are fully lowered or blocked when the machine is being repaired or is not in use, with controls in neutral, motor stopped and brakes set.

- Machinery or parts held up by slings, hoists or jacks must be substantially blocked or cribbed before anyone is allowed to work under or between them.

- Bidirectional machines such as rollers, compactors, loaders and dozers must have a working horn that can be told apart from the surrounding noise, used as needed when moving in either direction.

- Earthmoving or compacting equipment with an obstructed view to the rear is not used in reverse unless the reverse alarm is working or an employee signals that it is safe.

- Equipment left unattended at night next to a highway in use, or next to work in progress, must carry lights or reflectors, or be barricaded with them.

Ask the crew

- Stand where the operator can see you before you approach. Show me.

- What is behind that machine right now, and does the operator know?

- Who is the spotter on this pour, and how does he stop the truck?

Close with this

If you have not made eye contact, you are not there as far as that machine is concerned.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: STRUCK BY AND WORK ZONES

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Everybody point at where the trucks and the equipment move on this site today. That is the zone. If you are in it, you need to be seen, and somebody needs to be watching.

The talk

Struck by covers three different things and they need three different answers: vehicles and equipment, falling or flying objects, and material that swings or rolls.

Vehicles first. Backing is the one that kills. A pickup, a dump truck, a skid steer, a delivery truck that has never been on this site before. Every one of them has a blind zone directly behind it that is longer than most people believe, and the driver genuinely cannot see you.

The answer is a spotter with agreed hand signals, standing where the driver can see them in the mirror, never behind the vehicle. If the spotter loses sight of the driver, the vehicle stops. And a reverse alarm is not a substitute for a spotter, because on a loud site nobody hears one after the first hour.

High visibility clothing is how you get counted as a person rather than a shape. Vests on everybody on a site with vehicle movement, and anybody working near public traffic needs it as a matter of survival, not policy.

Falling objects are the second category. Anything above head height that can be knocked, dropped or blown. Toeboards on scaffold platforms, tethers on tools used at height, hard hats on every head below, and nobody working directly under somebody else if it can be avoided.

Third, the things that swing and roll. Suspended loads, a load being landed, material stacked and not banded, pipe on a rack, a load shifting on a trailer. Never stand under or in line with a suspended load, and never put yourself between a load and a fixed object.

And if the job touches a public road, that is a work zone. Cones, signs, a taper, flaggers who are trained, and a barrier if the speed and volume call for it. Drivers do not slow down because they see people. They slow down because the zone tells them to.

Point at these before anybody starts

- Where vehicles and equipment travel and turn on this site today

- The blind zone behind the biggest vehicle here, paced out in front of everybody

- Who is spotting, and what the hand signals are

- High visibility clothing on everybody in the vehicle area

- Anything overhead: work above, stacked material, loads, unbanded bundles

- The public road side: cones, signs, taper and who is flagging

The rules that apply

- No vehicle backs up in a work area without a functioning reverse alarm and, where anybody is on foot, a spotter.

- The spotter stands where the driver can see them, never behind the vehicle, and the vehicle stops the moment eye contact is lost.

- High visibility clothing for everybody working around moving vehicles or near public traffic.

- Never stand under or in line with a suspended load, and never between a load and a fixed object.

- Tether tools used at height, use toeboards or debris netting, and keep people out from under overhead work.

- Work zones on public roads get proper signs, tapers and trained flaggers, not a cone and a wave.

Ask the crew

- Who is spotting for the delivery today, and where are they standing?

- Is anybody working directly under somebody else on this job right now?

- Which vehicle here has the worst blind spot, and who has been walking through it?

Close with this

Be seen, stay out of the swing and the blind zone, and nothing backs up on this site without somebody watching.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

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TOOLBOX TALK: FALL PROTECTION

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Six feet. That is the number this whole talk is about. Six feet to an unprotected edge on this job and something has to be protecting you, every time, not most of the time.

The talk

Falls kill more construction workers than anything else, and it is not close. Most of those falls are from under thirty feet, and a large share are from under twenty. You do not need a tower crane to die from a fall. A second story window opening will do it.

In construction the trigger is six feet to a lower level. At six feet, an unprotected side or edge needs a guardrail, a safety net or a personal fall arrest system. There is no fourth option called being careful.

Guardrails are the best of the three because they work whether or not you remember to do anything. A harness only works if it is worn, adjusted, and connected to a real anchor. Two out of three is a fall with a longer story attached.

The anchor is where most people get it wrong. An anchor for fall arrest has to hold five thousand pounds per person, or be designed by a qualified person with a safety factor of two. A vent pipe is not an anchor. A conduit run is not an anchor. Another guy is not an anchor.

Then there is the math nobody does. Free fall, plus the deceleration distance of the shock pack, plus the length of your body below the D ring, plus a safety margin. That is easily eighteen feet with a six foot lanyard. If you are clipped at your feet on the second floor, you will hit the ground before the system stops you. Anchor overhead, use a retractable in low clearance, and know how far you will actually fall.

Last thing. If somebody does fall and is hanging in a harness, that is a rescue clock, not a phone call you make when you get around to it. Suspension in a harness cuts off circulation in the legs. The plan for getting them down has to exist before the fall, not after.

Point at these before anybody starts

- Every unprotected edge on this site right now, and what is protecting it

- The anchor point each person is going to use today, named out loud

- One harness, inspected in front of everybody: webbing, stitching, D ring, buckles, label

- The fall clearance below the work area, floor to floor, counted out

- Any floor hole or opening, and whether the cover is secured and marked

- Where the rescue gear is and who is calling 911 if somebody ends up hanging

The rules that apply

- Six feet to a lower level in construction means guardrails, nets or a personal fall arrest system, with no exceptions for short tasks.

- Anchors for fall arrest hold 5,000 pounds per attached person, or are designed by a qualified person with a safety factor of at least two.

- Anchor overhead where you can. Clipping at foot level roughly doubles your free fall distance.

- Inspect the harness and lanyard before every use, and remove from service anything that has already arrested a fall.

- Floor holes and roof openings get a cover that is secured, marked and able to hold twice the load that could be put on it.

- There must be a rescue plan for a suspended worker that does not start with waiting for the fire department.

Ask the crew

- Name your anchor point for today. Not the general area, the actual thing you are clipping to.

- How far is the floor below your work area, and how far will you actually drop before the system stops you?

- If somebody is hanging in a harness in ten minutes, what is the first thing we do?

Close with this

Nobody works over an unprotected six foot edge on this job. If the protection is not there yet, the work waits until it is.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: ROOF WORK

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Before anybody goes up, we are going to name the three edges on this roof, the anchor each of us is using, and where the skylights are. Five minutes now, so nobody guesses later.

The talk

A steep roof, anything steeper than four in twelve, means fall protection at six feet with no alternative. Guardrails, nets or personal fall arrest. On a residential reroof that is almost always a harness, a rope grab and an anchor screwed into the ridge framing.

Low slope roofs, four in twelve or flatter, give you more options: a guardrail system, a safety net, a fall arrest system, or in some cases a warning line and a safety monitor away from the edge. The warning line is a real system with real spacing rules, not a chalk line and good intentions.

The anchor goes into structure, not sheathing. Half inch plywood will not hold five thousand pounds and it will not hold you. Ridge anchors are lagged into rafters or trusses, and the lags are the ones the manufacturer specifies, not whatever was in the truck.

Skylights kill people every year. From above, on a low slope roof, a skylight looks like part of the deck, especially under a new layer of felt or a light dusting of snow. A skylight is a hole. It gets a screen, a cover rated for twice the load, or a guardrail around it, before anybody walks the roof.

Weather decides more than any of us do. Frost on shingles in the morning, dew that has not burned off, wind over about twenty five miles an hour with sheet goods in your hands. Those are stop conditions. Nobody on this crew has to justify coming down.

And the way up and down. Ladder tied at the top, three feet past the eave, footed on solid ground. The last three feet of the climb, stepping from ladder to roof, is where a lot of it happens because that is the moment people let go with both hands.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The eave, the rakes and any valley edge where somebody will be working

- Every skylight, chimney chase, roof hatch and framed opening, named out loud

- The anchor points, and what structural member each one is fastened to

- The access ladder, tied at the top and extended three feet above the eave

- The ground below the work area, and where material and debris are landing

- The forecast for the next four hours, wind and rain and temperature

The rules that apply

- Steep roofs, steeper than 4 in 12, require conventional fall protection at 6 feet. There is no monitor only option.

- Low slope roofs allow guardrails, nets, fall arrest, or a warning line system used the way the standard describes.

- Anchors fasten to structural framing with the manufacturer's specified fasteners, never to sheathing alone.

- Skylights and roof openings are covered, screened or guarded before the roof is worked, and covers are secured and marked.

- Work stops for frost, ice, standing water, heavy rain or high wind, and nobody is questioned for calling it.

- The access ladder is tied off, extends 3 feet above the eave and sits on firm level ground.

Ask the crew

- Name your anchor. Which rafter is it in, and who set it?

- How many openings are in this roof, and has every one of them been covered?

- What is the wind doing this afternoon, and at what point do we come down?

Close with this

Anchors set, openings covered, ladder tied. If any one of those three is missing, the roof waits.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: FLOOR AND ROOF OPENINGS

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

How many openings are in the deck we are standing on? Count them out loud. If we cannot agree on the number, that is the talk.

The talk

A hole is any gap two inches or more in its least dimension in a floor, roof or other walking surface. That is smaller than most people picture. A two inch gap catches a boot and breaks an ankle. A stair opening kills.

The rule is simple: cover it, guard it, or fill it. A cover has to hold at least twice the weight of any worker, equipment and material that could be on it at once. That means real material, sized properly, not a scrap of quarter inch luan.

Then it gets secured. A cover that is not fastened down is a cover that slides sideways the first time somebody drags a compressor across it. Screw it, cleat it, block it, but fix it in place.

Then it gets marked. One word in spray paint, HOLE or COVER, on the top face. This is the step everybody skips and it is the step that saves the electrician who shows up on Thursday and has no idea what was framed on Monday.

The rule about removing one: whoever takes a cover off owns that hole until it is back. Not the foreman, not the next trade. If you have to pull a cover to run a duct, you guard the opening while it is open and you put the cover back before you leave the floor, even if you are coming back in an hour.

This is also a housekeeping talk in disguise. Openings get lost under debris, stacked material and sheet goods. If you cannot see the deck, you cannot see the hole in it.

Point at these before anybody starts

- Every opening on this level: stairwells, chases, shafts, floor sinks, skylight curbs

- Each cover, and whether it is actually fastened down or just laid over

- The marking on each cover, readable from standing height

- Anything stacked on top of a cover that stops it being seen

- Guardrails at the stair opening and any shaft big enough to fall down

- The edge of the deck itself, which is the biggest opening on the floor

The rules that apply

- Any hole 2 inches or more in the least dimension gets a cover, a guardrail or a fill, with no exceptions for small ones.

- Covers support at least twice the weight of workers, equipment and materials that could be imposed at any one time.

- Covers are secured against accidental displacement by wind, equipment or foot traffic.

- Every cover is marked HOLE or COVER, or color coded to a site standard everyone has been told about.

- Whoever removes a cover guards the opening for as long as it is open and replaces the cover before leaving the area.

- Skylights count as holes and get a screen, a cover or a guardrail before roof work begins.

Ask the crew

- Is there an opening on this job you have walked past all week and stopped noticing?

- Who is pulling a cover today, and what is guarding that hole while it is off?

- If a cover here got stepped on by two of us and a cart, would it hold?

Close with this

Cover it, fasten it, mark it. If you take one off, it is yours until it is back on.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: GUARDRAILS

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Everybody point at a guardrail on this site. Now tell me, without touching it, whether it would stop a man who tripped and fell against it sideways. That is the whole talk.

The talk

The top rail sits at 42 inches, plus or minus 3. That is a real tolerance, so 39 to 45 is legal and 38 is not. If anybody here is on stilts, the rail has to go up by the height of the stilts, which nobody ever does.

It has to take 200 pounds applied within 2 inches of the top edge, in any outward or downward direction, at any point along it. Not at the post. At any point, including the middle of the longest run, which is where it is weakest and where a falling man will hit it.

There is a second half to that test everybody forgets. When the 200 pounds is pushed down, the top edge must not drop below 39 inches. A rail that takes the load by bending to thigh height has failed, because a man going over it is exactly what it was there to stop.

Between the top rail and the deck there has to be something: a midrail halfway up, or screen, or mesh, or balusters no more than 19 inches apart, unless there is a wall or parapet at least 21 inches high. Whatever fills that gap has to take 150 pounds in any downward or outward direction.

Some materials are simply out. Steel banding and plastic banding shall not be used as top rails or midrails, and that is a flat prohibition with no exception in it. Rails have to be at least a quarter inch thick to stop them cutting, and if wire rope is used for a top rail it has to be flagged at no more than 6 foot intervals in high visibility material.

Holes and openings have their own rules. Guardrails go on every unprotected side of a hole. Where a hole is used for passing materials, no more than two sides get removable sections, and when it is not in use it gets covered or railed all the way round. Where the hole is a ladderway, it gets a gate or the rail gets offset so nobody can walk straight into it.

And at a hoisting area, the access opening gets a chain, a gate or a removable section across it whenever hoisting is not happening. That gap is open on purpose and everybody stops seeing it by the second day.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The longest unsupported run of top rail on this site, which is the weakest point on it.

- Any rail made of banding, rope or anything that was never designed to be a rail.

- The gap between the top rail and the deck, and what is actually filling it.

- Every hoisting opening and ladderway, and whether it has a gate or a chain.

- Any hole cover on this site that is not secured and not marked.

- The one rail here that somebody has already had to lean on this week.

The rules that apply

- Top edge height shall be 42 inches plus or minus 3 inches above the walking or working level, increased by the height of any stilts in use.

- The system shall withstand without failure a force of at least 200 pounds applied within 2 inches of the top edge, in any outward or downward direction, at any point along the top edge.

- Under that 200 pound load applied downward, the top edge shall not deflect to a height less than 39 inches above the walking or working level.

- Midrails go midway, screens and mesh go top rail to deck across the full opening, and intermediate members go no more than 19 inches apart, with no opening wider than 19 inches.

- Midrails and equivalent members shall withstand at least 150 pounds applied in any downward or outward direction at any point.

- Steel banding and plastic banding shall not be used as top rails or midrails, and wire rope top rails shall be flagged at not more than 6 foot intervals.

Ask the crew

- How high is the top rail, and how far can it bend before it has failed?

- Where on a run of guardrail would you apply the test load if you wanted it to fail?

- Name one opening on this site that is protected only because nobody has walked into it yet.

Close with this

Forty two inches, two hundred pounds, anywhere along it. Everything else is a rail somebody put up to feel better.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: MENTAL HEALTH

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Nobody has to say anything in this one. Just listen, and if one number lands wrong with you, stay behind for a minute afterwards and we will talk about it then, not now, and not in front of everybody.

The talk

CDC published suicide rates by occupation for 2021. For working men across every occupation in the country the rate was 32.0 per hundred thousand. For men in construction and extraction it was 65.6. That is not a bit higher. It is double.

It is not only the men. Construction laborers was one of the five highest rates of any detailed occupation for women, at 38.6, against 8.0 for working women overall.

Nobody knows exactly why and the honest list is long: the work is seasonal and the money is not steady, the injuries turn into painkillers, the drink after the shift is part of the job, you move from site to site and never keep a crew, and this is a trade where saying you are struggling is heard as saying you cannot do the work.

That last one is the part we can actually change today. Nothing here is going to fix anybody's money or anybody's back. What this crew can do is stop treating it as the one thing that cannot be said out loud.

The warning signs are not dramatic. Somebody who was always here starts being late. Somebody who never drank at lunch does. Somebody stops taking the mickey. Somebody gives away a tool they have had for twenty years. Somebody who talks about being a burden, even as a joke.

And what you say is smaller than you think. Not a speech. You look off. Are you all right, properly? And then the hard bit, which is to stay quiet and let it be uncomfortable for ten seconds instead of filling it. Most people have never been asked twice in their life.

If it is worse than that, asking somebody directly whether they are thinking about killing themselves does not put the idea in their head. That is the thing everybody is afraid of and it is not true. Asking straight is what gives them permission to say yes.

The number is 988, from any phone in the US. You can call it, text it, or chat online, any hour of any day, free and confidential, and it is not only for the worst moment. You can call it about somebody else. You can call it on the way home about a conversation you had on this site and did not know what to do with.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The number 988, said out loud by everybody here so it is in the room.

- Anybody on this crew nobody has seen properly in a fortnight.

- Whether this company has an employee assistance program, and whether anybody knows the number.

- The person on this crew who always asks how everybody is, and who asks them.

- What time this crew actually finishes, and whether anybody here is doing seven days.

- Where somebody could have a conversation on this site without eight people hearing it.

The rules that apply

- 988 is the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Call, text or chat, 24 hours a day, every day, free and confidential, and available in Spanish.

- 988 is not only for a crisis. It takes calls from people worried about somebody else.

- Asking somebody directly whether they are thinking about suicide does not increase the risk. It lowers the barrier to them saying yes.

- Never agree to keep it secret. Anybody who tells you they are in danger needs one more person to know, and you can tell them that before they answer.

- If somebody is in immediate danger they do not get left alone, and that is a 911 call, not a lift home.

- There is no OSHA standard behind any of this. It is a company rule and it holds on this site because this company says so.

Ask the crew

- What is the number, and has everybody here got it in their phone now?

- Who would you ring at ten at night, and would you actually do it?

- Name one person on this crew you have not spoken to properly in a month.

Close with this

Twice the rate of every other trade and nobody talks about it. That is the bit we can change by the end of this shift.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: HEAT ILLNESS

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Look at who is new on this crew this week. New workers are the ones who die of heat, and that is not an opinion, it is what the investigations keep finding.

The talk

Water, rest, shade. Everything else in this talk is detail. Water before you are thirsty, roughly a cup every fifteen or twenty minutes in the heat, rest in the shade before you feel bad, not after.

Acclimatization is the part nobody plans for. It takes about a week to two weeks of gradually increasing exposure for a body to adapt. A large share of heat deaths happen in a worker's first few days on the job or on the first hot day after a cool spell. New people, people back from vacation, and everybody in the first heat wave of the season get a lighter first few days.

Know the two stages. Heat exhaustion is heavy sweating, cool clammy skin, weakness, dizziness, nausea, headache and a fast weak pulse. That person stops work, goes to shade, loosens clothing, drinks and gets cooled. They do not go back to work that day.

Heat stroke is different and it is a medical emergency. Confusion, slurred speech, stumbling, no longer sweating in some cases, hot red skin and a body temperature that is climbing. Call 911, get them into shade, get cold water and ice on them at the neck, armpits and groin, and start cooling immediately while you wait. Do not wait for the ambulance to start cooling.

The sign everybody misses is confusion. Somebody who is suddenly argumentative, does not answer properly, or is doing the task wrong in a way they never do. That is a brain running too hot, and it is the last warning before collapse.

Watch each other, because the person overheating is the last to know. Buddy up in the afternoon, and nobody works alone in extreme heat.

Point at these before anybody starts

- Where the water is, and whether there is enough of it for the whole shift

- Where the shade is. If there is none, where the shade is going to be built

- Who is new this week, and what their lighter schedule is today

- The forecast high, the humidity and when the hottest part of the day hits

- Where the ice is, and who is calling 911 if it comes to that

- The buddy pairs for this afternoon

The rules that apply

- Water available at all times, cool, and close enough that people actually drink it. A cup every 15 to 20 minutes.

- Shade or an air conditioned space for breaks, and breaks taken before symptoms start.

- New and returning workers get a gradual build up over the first week or two. Roughly 20 percent of a full shift on day one is the NIOSH model for unacclimatized workers.

- Heat exhaustion means stop, cool, hydrate and do not return to work that shift.

- Heat stroke means call 911 and start aggressive cooling immediately with ice and water, not later.

- Nobody works alone in extreme heat. Watch each other for confusion and stumbling.

Ask the crew

- Who here is in their first week on this job or back after time off?

- How much water have you had this morning, honestly?

- If somebody goes down at two o'clock, who calls, who cools and where is the ice?

Close with this

Drink before you are thirsty, rest before you feel bad, and if somebody is confused it is an emergency, not a break.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: WATER AND TOILETS

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Two questions. Where is the drinking water on this site, and how many toilets are there for how many people? Somebody count.

The talk

An adequate supply of potable water shall be provided in all places of employment. Potable means it meets the drinking water standards of the state or local authority, or the EPA's National Primary Drinking Water Regulations at 40 CFR part 141. Not a hose off the standpipe.

The container rules are specific and they are about disease, not tidiness. A portable container used to dispense drinking water shall be capable of being tightly closed and equipped with a tap, and water shall not be dipped from containers. Any container used for drinking water shall be clearly marked as to its contents and not used for anything else.

And one flat prohibition, four words long: the common drinking cup is prohibited. If single service cups are supplied then there has to be a sanitary container for the clean ones and a receptacle for the used ones, which is the bit everybody forgets.

Nonpotable water, meaning water for industrial or firefighting purposes, gets signs saying clearly that it is unsafe and not to be used for drinking, washing or cooking. And there shall be no cross connection, open or potential, between a potable and a nonpotable system. Potential. A hose that could be swapped over counts.

Toilets, and there is a table. Twenty or fewer employees: one facility. Twenty or more: one toilet seat and one urinal per 40 workers. Two hundred or more: one toilet seat and one urinal per 50 workers. Under temporary field conditions there shall be not less than one toilet facility available, and where there is no sanitary sewer the options are privies where they will not contaminate ground or surface water, chemical, recirculating or combustion toilets.

There is one exception and it gets stretched further than it goes. The toilet requirements do not apply to mobile crews having transportation readily available to nearby toilet facilities. Readily available transportation to a facility that exists. Not a petrol station eight minutes away that somebody might let you use.

Washing facilities. The employer shall provide adequate washing facilities for employees applying paints, coatings, herbicides or insecticides, or in other operations where contaminants may be harmful, in near proximity to the worksite and equipped to actually remove the substance. Lavatories shall be available in all places of employment, with hot and cold running water or tepid running water, hand soap or similar cleansing agent, and individual

towels, air blowers or clean sections of continuous cloth toweling.

That last one matters more than it sounds on a job with lead, silica, solvents or pesticides, because the route into somebody is a sandwich eaten with the hands they have been working with. Which is also why no employee shall be allowed to consume food or beverages in a toilet room, nor in any area exposed to a toxic material.

And if a standard requires protective clothing because of contamination with toxic materials, change rooms with separate storage for street clothes and for the protective clothing have to be provided. Separate. The point is that the contaminated kit never touches what somebody wears home to their family.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The drinking water: is it potable, is the container tapped and closed, is it marked.

- Cups. A sanitary container for clean ones and a bin for used ones, or neither.

- The head count today against the table, and whether the toilets match it.

- Soap, water and towels at the lavatory, all three, not two of three.

- Where people are eating, and what is in the air or on the ground there.

- For anybody on paint, coating, herbicide or insecticide: somewhere to wash it off, near the work.

The rules that apply

- An adequate supply of potable water shall be provided in all places of employment. The common drinking cup is prohibited. Portable dispensing containers shall be capable of being tightly closed, equipped with a tap, clearly marked and not used for any other purpose, and water shall not be dipped from them.

- Outlets for nonpotable water shall be identified by signs indicating clearly that the water is unsafe and not to be used for drinking, washing or cooking, and there shall be no cross connection, open or potential, between potable and nonpotable systems.

- Toilets shall be provided per Table D-1: one facility for 20 or fewer employees; one toilet seat and one urinal per 40 workers at 20 or more; one toilet seat and one urinal per 50 workers at 200 or more. Under temporary field conditions not less than one toilet facility shall be available.

- The toilet requirements do not apply to mobile crews having transportation readily available to nearby toilet facilities.

- Adequate washing facilities shall be provided for employees applying paints, coatings, herbicides or insecticides or in other operations where contaminants may be harmful, in near proximity to the worksite. Lavatories shall have hot and cold or tepid running water, hand soap or similar cleansing agents, and individual towels or air blowers.

- No employee shall be allowed to consume food or beverages in a toilet room nor in any area exposed to a toxic material. Where protective clothing is required because of contamination with toxic materials, change rooms with separate storage for street clothes and protective clothing shall be provided.

Ask the crew

- How many toilets does a crew of 60 need under the table?

- What are the three things that have to be at a lavatory?

- Who on this site is covered by the mobile crew exception, and who only thinks they are?

Close with this

None of this is a comfort issue. Every line in it is there because something got into somebody.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

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TOOLBOX TALK: LIGHTNING AND SEVERE WEATHER

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Look up. Now look at the crane, the scaffold and the roof. If a storm arrives in twenty minutes, who is furthest from the ground and how long does it take to get them down?

The talk

There is no OSHA standard for lightning. What there is is the General Duty Clause and a joint OSHA and NOAA fact sheet, which is the guidance everybody uses and which says one thing above all: when thunder roars, go indoors.

Any thunder you can hear was made by lightning, and the distance does not make you safe. Strikes reach well outside the rain. People are regularly hit under blue sky at the edge of a storm.

So the trigger is sound, not sight, and it is not negotiable. First thunder means work stops and people come down. Cranes, scaffolds, roofs, lifts and ladders are the first things off, not the last.

Shelter is a building with wiring and plumbing, which give the current somewhere to go. If there is no building, a hard topped vehicle with the windows up is the fallback. A site trailer counts. An open sided tent, a shed, a portable toilet and a pickup bed do not.

You stay in shelter for thirty minutes after the last thunder. Not after the last flash, and not after the rain stops. Thirty minutes from the last thing you heard, and the clock restarts every time you hear another one.

The rest of severe weather is wind. Lifts and cranes have wind limits from the manufacturer and they are lower than people expect, and a sheet of plywood or a stack of siding becomes a different object at forty miles an hour.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The tallest thing on this site, and who works on it.

- The building or trailer you would shelter in, and how long the walk is.

- The vehicles here, and which of them are hard topped.

- Loose sheet material, and where it goes when a wind warning comes in.

- The lift, and the wind speed on its plate.

- Whoever is watching the forecast today, and on what.

The rules that apply

- First thunder stops the work. Not first lightning seen, first thunder heard.

- Everyone comes down off cranes, scaffolds, roofs, lifts and ladders before sheltering.

- Shelter is a substantial building with wiring and plumbing, or a hard topped vehicle with the windows up if there is no building.

- Nobody returns to work until 30 minutes after the last thunder, and the clock restarts on each new rumble.

- Stay away from isolated tall trees, hilltops, utility poles, towers, cranes, large equipment, ladders, scaffolding and rooftops.

- Lifts and cranes come down to the manufacturer's wind limit, and loose sheet material is secured before the wind arrives, not during it.

Ask the crew

- How long from first thunder until everybody here is inside something?

- Where exactly is inside, and does it have wiring and plumbing?

- How long do we wait, and from what moment?

Close with this

Thirty minutes of standing in a trailer is the cheapest thing that will happen on this job all year.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: AERIAL LIFTS AND SCISSOR LIFTS

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Whoever is running the lift today, you are up first. Walk us through your pre start check, out loud, before you get in it.

The talk

There are two machines here and two different rules, which is where people get caught. In a boom lift, a bucket truck or anything that articulates, you wear a full body harness with a lanyard attached to the boom or the basket. In a scissor lift, the guardrails are the fall protection, so you stay inside them and you keep the chains or gates closed.

Never tie off to the structure you are working on from inside a boom lift. If the boom moves and you are anchored to a beam, the basket goes and you do not. That rule exists because it has happened.

The ground decides whether the machine stays up. Fresh backfill, a covered trench, a soft shoulder, a hidden septic lid. A lift that is fine on slab is a tip over on fill, and the load chart assumes firm and level, not close enough.

Look up before you go up. Ten feet is the minimum clearance from an overhead power line up to fifty kV, and more above that. A boom does not have to touch a line to kill somebody. Treat every line as live and assume nobody has de energized anything for you.

Do not climb on the rails. Ever. Not to reach the last foot, not to see over, not because you are almost done. The whole system, guardrails and harness both, assumes your feet are on the floor of the basket.

And the pre start. Controls at ground level and at the platform, emergency lowering, horn, tires, leaks, and the fact that the operator is trained on this specific model. The manual lives with the machine for a reason.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The ground under all four wheels or outriggers, and what is underneath it

- Overhead: power lines, service drops, tree limbs, and the clearance to each

- The harness and lanyard for the boom lift, and where the anchor in the basket is

- The guardrails, gate and chains on the scissor lift

- The pre start checklist for this machine, filled in today, not last week

- The load rating plate, and what the platform is actually carrying today

The rules that apply

- Boom and articulating lifts: full body harness with a lanyard attached to the boom or basket anchor, never to an adjacent structure.

- Scissor lifts: stay inside the guardrails with gates and chains closed. That is the fall protection system.

- Keep at least 10 feet of clearance from overhead power lines up to 50 kV, and more above that voltage.

- Set up on firm level ground within the machine's rated slope, with outriggers deployed where the machine has them.

- Do the pre start function check at ground level and platform level before the first lift of the shift.

- Nobody stands or climbs on the rails, the toeboards or a plank laid across the basket.

Ask the crew

- Which lift are you in today, and which rule applies to it, harness or guardrails?

- What is above your work area, and how close does the boom get to it?

- Is the ground under this machine what it looks like, or is there backfill under there?

Close with this

Feet on the floor of the basket, clearance overhead, firm ground under the wheels. That is the whole talk.

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TOOLBOX TALK: HAND SAFETY

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Look at your hands. Every one of us uses them for everything on this job and none of us plans where they are going to be during the next ten seconds. That is the whole talk.

The talk

Think in terms of the line of fire. Before you do anything, ask where the energy goes if this slips, drops, swings, springs back or closes. Then put your hands outside that path. That one habit prevents more hand injuries than any glove ever made.

Pinch points are the ones that take fingers. Material being set down, a door being hung, sheet goods being stood up, a load being landed, a tailgate, a scissor lift rail, anything with a hinge. The hand goes on the outside face, never in the gap, and never underneath.

Knives are the other half. Most utility knife injuries happen cutting toward the hand holding the material, or with a dull blade that needs more force and then slips. Cut away from yourself, change the blade when it drags, and use a self retracting or hook blade where you can.

Gloves need matching to the hazard. Cut resistant for handling metal, glass and sheet goods. Leather for rough material and heat. Chemical gloves for chemicals, because ordinary gloves absorb and hold solvent against your skin. Impact gloves for demo and anything with a hammer near it.

And the exception that matters: no gloves near rotating equipment. A glove that catches in a drill, a grinder, a saw or a bit pulls the hand into it. That is the one place where bare hands are the safer choice.

Last thing, the small cuts. A cut that seems minor on a job site is a puncture full of concrete dust, rust or treated lumber. Clean it, cover it, report it. Infection is what turns a two day cut into a two week problem.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The pinch points on today's work: hinges, loads landing, sheet goods, tailgates

- The gloves people are wearing, and whether they match the hazard

- Every rotating tool on site, where gloves come off

- Utility knives: blade condition, cutting direction, and whether a hook blade would be safer

- Where hands are going to be during the riskiest lift or set today

- The first aid kit, where it is and whether it has anything left in it

The rules that apply

- Identify the line of fire before every task and keep hands out of it.

- Never place a hand under a load, inside a gap that can close, or between material and a fixed object.

- Match the glove to the hazard: cut resistant, leather, chemical or impact.

- No gloves near rotating tools, bits or wheels where the glove can be caught and pull the hand in.

- Cut away from your body with a sharp blade, and retract or sheath the blade the moment you finish.

- Report and treat every cut and puncture, however small. Infection is the usual complication.

Ask the crew

- On today's work, where is the pinch point nobody has mentioned yet?

- Who is wearing gloves near a rotating tool today?

- When did anybody last change a utility knife blade instead of pushing harder?

Close with this

Know where the energy goes and keep your hands out of it. Right glove for the hazard, no gloves near anything spinning.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: PPE AND EYE PROTECTION

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Quick check around the circle. Hard hat, glasses, boots, and anything the task needs. Anybody missing something, say it now, because we have spares in the truck and there is no version of this where you work without it.

The talk

The order matters. Eliminate the hazard, substitute something safer, engineer it out, change the work practice, and only then put equipment on the person. If a talk about PPE is the only control we have for something, we have skipped four better answers.

Eyes. Around two thousand eye injuries a day happen at work in the United States, and the great majority of them would have been prevented or reduced by proper eye protection. Safety glasses meeting ANSI Z87.1, with the marking on the lens or frame, and side protection. Prescription glasses on their own are not safety glasses.

Match the eye protection to the job. Safety glasses for general work, goggles for dust, chips and splash, a face shield over glasses for grinding, cutting and chemicals, and the right shade for welding. A face shield alone is never enough, it goes over glasses.

Head. Hard hats where anything can fall, fly or swing, or where there is a bump or electrical hazard, meeting ANSI Z89.1. The suspension is what stops the impact, not the shell, so the suspension has to be adjusted, intact and not reversed unless the hat is rated for it. No holes drilled, no paint, no stickers over cracks.

Feet. Sturdy work boots, and a puncture resistant sole on any site with nails and metal debris, which is all of them. Sneakers on a framing job are how people end up with a nail through the arch of the foot.

The employer pays. With narrow exceptions for ordinary prescription eyewear and everyday clothing, OSHA requires the employer to provide required PPE at no cost to the employee. Nobody here is buying their own glasses.

And PPE that does not fit is PPE that comes off. Glasses that fog, gloves that are too big, a hat that slides, a respirator that leaks. If it does not fit, say so and we get one that does, because the alternative is you working without it.

Point at these before anybody starts

- Everybody's eye protection, checking for the Z87 mark and for scratches

- Hard hat suspensions, adjusted and undamaged, and shells with no cracks or holes

- Boots, looking for worn soles and no puncture protection

- The task specific PPE today: face shield, goggles, hearing, respirator, high visibility

- The spares in the truck and who needs one

- Anything that fogs, slips, pinches or leaks, which means the wrong size

The rules that apply

- Eye protection meeting ANSI Z87.1 with side protection whenever there is any risk of flying particles, dust or splash.

- A face shield is always worn over safety glasses, never instead of them.

- Hard hats meeting ANSI Z89.1 wherever objects can fall, fly or swing, with the suspension intact and adjusted.

- Sturdy boots with puncture resistant soles on any site with nails or metal debris.

- Required PPE is provided by the employer at no cost, with narrow exceptions such as ordinary prescription eyewear.

- PPE that does not fit gets replaced, not tolerated. Ill fitting equipment gets taken off.

Ask the crew

- Whose safety glasses are so scratched they cannot see through them properly?

- What is today's task specific PPE, beyond hat, glasses and boots?

- Is anybody working without something because they do not have it? Say it now.

Close with this

Z87 on the lens, suspension adjusted, boots that stop a nail. If it does not fit, tell me and we swap it today.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: HEARING PROTECTION

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Rule of thumb before we start. If you have to raise your voice to be understood by somebody at arm's length, it is loud enough to be damaging you right now.

The talk

Noise damage is mechanical. The hair cells in the inner ear that pick up sound get destroyed by loud sound and they do not grow back. There is no treatment, no surgery and no recovery. What is gone is gone.

The construction limit is ninety decibels A weighted averaged over eight hours, and the allowable time halves for roughly every five decibel increase. Two hours at one hundred decibels is the limit. A circular saw is around one hundred. A chop saw and a chainsaw are higher. A jackhammer or a powder actuated tool is higher still.

That means a normal framing day is over the limit before lunch, and nobody notices because the damage is painless. The warning sign is ringing in your ears at the end of the day, or the world sounding muffled on the drive home. That is not tiredness, that is injury.

Plugs or muffs both work if they are worn properly, and neither works at all if they are not. Foam plugs have to be rolled thin, inserted while pulling the ear up and back, and held until they expand. A plug sitting in the opening of the ear does almost nothing.

Muffs are better for people who go in and out of noise all day, because they are faster. Plugs are better under a hard hat in tight spaces and in heat. In very loud work, plugs and muffs together get you more than either alone.

And it is not just the operator. Noise fills a space. If somebody is running a chop saw ten feet away, you are in it too, and the person cutting has the protection while you have none.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The loudest tool on this site today, and who is near it

- Where the hearing protection is kept, and whether there is enough for everyone

- One person demonstrating how a foam plug actually goes in

- Who is working within earshot of the loud work, not just doing it

- Anybody who says their ears ring at the end of the day

- Whether we can move the loud work, enclose it, or do it when fewer people are here

The rules that apply

- The construction limit is 90 dBA as an 8 hour average, with allowable exposure time halving as the level rises.

- If you must raise your voice to be heard at arm's length, hearing protection is needed.

- Foam plugs are rolled down thin, inserted with the ear pulled up and back, and held while they expand.

- Protection covers everybody in the noise, not only the person running the tool.

- Double up with plugs and muffs for the loudest work such as jackhammers, powder actuated tools and demolition.

- Ringing ears or muffled hearing after a shift means the protection was not enough. Say so.

Ask the crew

- Whose ears ring at night? Be honest, because that is the early sign.

- Who is going to be standing near the loud work today without a tool in their hand?

- Is there a way to do the loudest cut somewhere else, or at a time when fewer of us are here?

Close with this

If you have to shout to be heard, put them in. Ringing at the end of the day means damage, not tiredness.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: STAIRWAYS

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Walk up the stairs on this job in your head. How many times have you caught yourself on them? Now tell me whether there is a handrail on both sides.

The talk

First, when a stairway is even required. A stairway or a ladder goes at every personnel point of access where there is a break in elevation of 19 inches or more, unless there is a ramp, a runway, a sloped embankment or a personnel hoist. Nineteen inches. That is one deep step and it is a legal trigger.

Stairs get installed between 30 and 50 degrees from horizontal. Outside that band it is not a stairway, and the thing people build at 55 degrees to save space is the thing people come down backwards in the rain.

Riser height and tread depth have to be uniform within a flight, and the variation cannot be more than a quarter inch anywhere in the system. That includes any foundation or block being used as one of the treads. A quarter inch is the number because that is roughly where a foot stops arriving where the brain expects it.

Four or more risers, or a rise of more than 30 inches, whichever is less, and the stairway needs at least one handrail and a stairrail along every unprotected side. Stairrails installed since March 1991 sit at not less than 36 inches. Handrails sit between 30 and 37 inches, measured from the tread at the face of the riser.

Pan stairs are the ones that actually hurt people here. Foot traffic is prohibited on pan stairs waiting to be filled with concrete unless they are temporarily fitted with wood or other solid material at least to the top edge of each pan, and those temporary treads have to be replaced when they wear below the pan edge. The same goes for skeleton metal stairs with no permanent treads yet.

Landings are not decoration. A temporary stairway needs a landing at least 30 inches in the direction of travel and 22 inches wide at every 12 feet of vertical rise, and the unprotected sides and edges of those landings get guardrails. Where a door opens straight onto a stairway there has to be a platform, and the door swing must not cut its effective width below 20 inches.

And the two lines everybody skips. All parts of stairways shall be free of hazardous projections, such as protruding nails. Slippery conditions on stairways shall be eliminated before the stairways are used to reach other levels. Before. Not at the end of the shift.

Point at these before anybody starts

- Every stairway on this job, and whether it has a handrail on the side people actually use.

- The one riser that is different from the others. There is always one.

- Any pan stair or skeleton stair being walked on before it was filled or fitted.

- The landings, and whether anything is stored on them.

- Any door that opens straight onto a flight with no platform in front of it.

- Mud, ice, grout or sawdust on any tread right now.

The rules that apply

- A stairway or ladder shall be provided at all personnel points of access where there is a break in elevation of 19 inches or more and no ramp, runway, sloped embankment or personnel hoist is provided.

- Stairs shall be installed between 30 and 50 degrees from horizontal, and riser height and tread depth shall be uniform within each flight, varying by no more than a quarter inch anywhere in the system.

- Stairways having four or more risers or rising more than 30 inches, whichever is less, shall have at least one handrail and a stairrail system along each unprotected side or edge.

- Handrails and stairrail top rails shall withstand at least 200 pounds applied within 2 inches of the top edge in any downward or outward direction at any point.

- Foot traffic is prohibited on unfilled pan stairs and on skeleton metal stairs unless they are fitted with temporary treads and landings covering the full width and depth.

- All parts of stairways shall be free of hazardous projections such as protruding nails, and slippery conditions shall be eliminated before the stairway is used.

Ask the crew

- What break in elevation makes a stairway or a ladder a requirement rather than a nice idea?

- Can you walk on a pan stair that has not been poured yet, and under what condition?

- Point at the tread on this site you have caught yourself on.

Close with this

A quarter of an inch out is enough. Your foot only has to arrive somewhere it did not expect once.

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TOOLBOX TALK: SILICA DUST

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Everybody who is cutting, grinding, drilling or chasing concrete, block, brick, stone or tile today, put your hand up. This talk is for you, and for everybody standing near you.

The talk

Silica is in concrete, block, brick, mortar, stone, tile and some engineered countertops. Cutting or grinding any of it breaks it into particles small enough to reach the deepest part of the lung, where the body cannot clear them.

What they cause is silicosis, which is permanent scarring of the lung, plus lung cancer, kidney disease and COPD. It is not an allergy and it does not wear off. The damage accumulates over years and the symptoms show up long after the exposure that caused them.

The permissible exposure limit is fifty micrograms per cubic meter of air as an eight hour average, with an action level of twenty five. Those numbers are tiny. A few minutes of dry cutting concrete indoors can put a person over the eight hour limit before lunch.

You do not have to do the math, because the standard gives you Table 1. For each common task, cutting with a saw, drilling, grinding, chipping, it lists the control. Almost always that control is water on the blade or a vacuum on the tool with a HEPA filter, and for some tasks a respirator on top of that. Follow the row for your task and you are compliant without air sampling.

Water is the simplest control on the site. A saw with integrated water, a hose on the cut, wet cutting masonry. It costs nothing and it removes most of the dust at source, which is the only place worth removing it.

And never dry sweep or use compressed air to clean up silica dust. That takes settled dust that was out of the air and puts it all back, at head height, for everybody. HEPA vacuum or wet methods, every time.

Point at these before anybody starts

- Every task today that cuts, grinds, drills or breaks concrete, block, brick, stone or tile

- The water feed or the vacuum shroud on each of those tools, and whether it works

- The HEPA vacuum, its filter and its bag

- Respirators, if the task row requires one, and whether the wearer is fit tested and clean shaven

- The cleanup method: wet or HEPA vacuum, never a broom or an air hose

- Who else is working downwind of the dust, including other trades

The rules that apply

- Follow the Table 1 control for your task: water, a HEPA vacuum shroud, or both, plus respiratory protection where the row calls for it.

- The permissible exposure limit is 50 micrograms per cubic meter over 8 hours, with an action level of 25.

- Never dry sweep and never use compressed air to clean silica dust unless no other method works and ventilation controls it.

- Indoors or in an enclosed area, the controls matter more, not less, because the dust has nowhere to go.

- Respirators need a fit test, medical evaluation and a clean shaven seal. Stubble breaks the seal.

- Keep other trades out of the dust zone while the work is running, or shift the work to when they are gone.

Ask the crew

- Who is cutting masonry today, and is the water or vacuum working on that tool right now?

- How are we cleaning up at the end of the day, and is there a broom involved?

- Who else will be in this space while the cutting is happening?

Close with this

Water on it or a vacuum on it, every cut. No brooms, no air hoses. The dust you cannot see is the dust that stays.

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TOOLBOX TALK: CUTTING AND GRINDING

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Whoever is running a grinder or a cutoff saw today, bring the wheel over. We are reading the rating on it out loud before it goes anywhere near the tool.

The talk

The first thing is speed matching. Every abrasive wheel has a maximum rpm printed on it and every tool has a no load speed on the plate. The wheel rating has to be equal to or higher than the tool speed. A wheel rated below the tool is a grenade with a timer on it.

The second is the right wheel for the job. A cutoff wheel is thin and made for cutting on its edge. A grinding wheel is thick and made for its face. Using a cutoff wheel to grind, or leaning a grinding wheel on its edge, loads it in the direction it was never designed for.

Inspect the wheel before it goes on. Chips, cracks, and anything that has been dropped. On the heavier bonded wheels the ring test still works: hang it on a pin, tap it gently with a non metallic handle and listen. A dead thud instead of a ring means a crack you cannot see.

The guard stays on and it stays positioned between the wheel and you. That is what a guard is for. Most grinder injuries are to the face, the neck and the hands, and most of them happened with the guard rotated out of the way or taken off entirely.

Let it come up to speed before it touches the work, and after you fit a new wheel stand to the side and run it for a minute. If a wheel is going to fail, it usually fails in that first minute.

Then the sparks. A cutoff saw throws a stream of hot metal twenty or thirty feet. That is a fire watch issue, a combustible material issue, and a burn issue for everybody downstream of you. Look at where the sparks are going before you start, not after something smells like smoke.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The rpm rating on the wheel against the rpm on the tool nameplate

- The wheel itself, checked for chips, cracks and impact damage

- The guard, present and positioned between the wheel and the operator

- Where the sparks will land: combustibles, other trades, gas lines, vehicles

- Face and eye protection, a full face shield over safety glasses for grinding

- The flange and the nut, correct for the wheel and tightened properly

The rules that apply

- The wheel's maximum rpm must be at or above the tool's rated speed. Check it every time you change a wheel.

- Use the wheel the way it was designed: cut with a cutoff wheel, grind with a grinding wheel, never the other way round.

- Inspect every wheel before mounting and discard any that is chipped, cracked or has been dropped.

- Guards stay fitted and positioned between the wheel and the operator.

- After fitting a new wheel, stand aside and run the tool at full speed for one minute before use.

- Clear combustibles from the spark path or shield them, and keep an extinguisher within reach for hot work.

Ask the crew

- What is the rpm on the wheel in your grinder right now? Not a guess.

- Where are your sparks going today, and who is standing in that line?

- Has anybody here had a wheel come apart on them? What happened?

Close with this

Right wheel, rated for the tool, guard in place, sparks aimed at nothing that burns. Face shield over glasses.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

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TOOLBOX TALK: WILDFIRE SMOKE

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

What is the air quality number right now, and who checked it? Not yesterday, not this morning at the yard. Right now, for this address.

The talk

What we are actually talking about is PM2.5: solid particles and liquid droplets suspended in air with a diameter of two and a half micrometers or smaller. That size is the whole problem. It does not get caught in your nose or your throat, it goes to the bottom of your lungs and some of it goes into your blood. You cannot feel it happening and a haze that looks mild can be a serious number.

There is no federal OSHA standard that puts a number on wildfire smoke. Three states have written one: California, Oregon and Washington. They were written at different times and they do not match, so the first thing to know is which rule this job is under, because the answer changes what has to happen today.

California, section 5141.1. The trigger is the current Air Quality Index for PM2.5 at 151 or greater, and the employer has to determine that at the start of each shift and periodically after, not once a day. It does not apply inside a building or a vehicle where the air is filtered and everything stays shut, or where somebody is in it for a total of one hour or less across the whole shift.

Once California is triggered, the order is fixed. Engineering controls first, to get exposure under a current AQI of 151 wherever that is feasible. Then administrative controls if it is not: relocating the work somewhere the number is lower, changing schedules, reducing work intensity, more rest breaks. Then respirators. From 151 up to 500 the employer has to provide enough respirators for voluntary use and encourage people to wear them, N95 or better. Above 500 it stops being voluntary and respirator use is required.

Oregon, rule 437-002-1081, is written in micrograms per cubic meter instead, which is what the AQI is calculated from. It applies at or above 35.5 micrograms per cubic meter. At or above 200.9, filtering facepiece respirators have to be worn. At or above 500.4, it is a full respiratory protection program under 1910.134, which means fit testing and medical evaluations.

Washington, chapter 296-820, is also written in micrograms and it starts lower than either of the others. From 20.5 the employer is encouraged to hand out N95s on request. From 35.5 to 250.4 the employer must provide them free to everyone exposed and encourage their use. From 250.5 to 500.3 they have to be put directly into each person's hand rather than left in a box somewhere. From 500.4 up, wearing one is mandatory and everybody is in

a full respiratory protection program.

Now the trap, and it is worth the whole five minutes. Oregon's rule says 500.4 micrograms per cubic meter is an AQI of 501. Washington's rule says 500.4 micrograms per cubic meter is an AQI of 849. Same amount of smoke, same air, two different AQI numbers, because the scale that converts micrograms into an AQI was changed between the two rules being written and the microgram number was not. So if your rule is written in micrograms, read the micrograms. A crew that runs the day off whatever the phone app is showing can be standing well over a legal threshold while the screen says something that sounds survivable.

The other half of every one of these rules is that you tell somebody. All three require a two way system: the employer tells you the number and what protection is available, and you tell the employer when the air gets worse or when somebody starts having symptoms, without fear of reprisal, which is written into the rule in those words. The symptoms named are asthma attacks, difficulty breathing and chest pain. Any of those today is a stop, not a wait and see.

One thing that trips people up on the paperwork side: where a respirator is voluntary rather than required, a filtering facepiece like an N95 does not need fit testing or a medical evaluation. Where it is required, it does. That is the real difference between the low bands and the top band, and it is why nobody should be waiting until the top band to think about it.

Point at these before anybody starts

- Today's number for this address, and which of the three rules this job is under.

- Where the respirators are, how many there are, and whether anybody has actually got one.

- Which vehicles and site boxes genuinely have filtered air with everything shut, and which just have the windows up.

- Work that can move, be rescheduled, or be slowed down today rather than pushed through.

- Anybody on the crew with asthma or a heart condition, who feels this first.

- The three symptoms, said out loud, and who to tell.

The rules that apply

- California 5141.1 applies where the current AQI for PM2.5 is 151 or greater and exposure is reasonably anticipated. Exposure has to be determined at the start of each shift and periodically thereafter. From an AQI of 151 up to 500 respirators are provided for voluntary use and use is encouraged; above 500 respirator use is required.

- Oregon 437-002-1081 applies at or above 35.5 micrograms per cubic meter of PM2.5. Filtering facepiece respirators must be worn at or above 200.9, and a full respiratory protection program under 29 CFR 1910.134 applies at or above 500.4.

- Washington chapter 296-820 requires N95s to be provided free to all exposed employees from 35.5 to 250.4 micrograms per cubic meter, distributed directly to each employee from 250.5 to 500.3, and provided and worn under a complete respiratory protection program from 500.4 up. The 15 minute exemption people quote is WAC

296-820-840(4)(b), and it disclaims only subsection (4), which is the band from 500.4 to 554.9. At 555 and above, subsection (5), the rule requires a full facepiece or a powered air purifying respirator and gives no short exposure exemption at all.

- Oregon's rule states that 500.4 micrograms per cubic meter is an AQI of 501. Washington's rule states that the same 500.4 micrograms per cubic meter is an AQI of 849. Oregon OSHA confirmed why in technical guidance TG 2024-01, dated 13 June 2024: the EPA changed how AQI is calculated from PM2.5 in May 2024, so the AQI values printed in the Oregon rule no longer reflect the current scale, while the microgram concentrations the rule actually sets are unaffected and still apply as written. Where a rule sets its thresholds in micrograms, the micrograms control and the AQI shown by an app does not.

- All three rules require a two way communication system: the employer informs employees of the current level and the protective measures available, and employees are encouraged to report worsening air quality and symptoms without fear of reprisal.

- Where respirator use is voluntary, fit testing and medical evaluation are not required for a filtering facepiece such as an N95. Where respirator use is required, the full respiratory protection standard applies.

Ask the crew

- What is the number for this site right now, and where did you get it from?

- What are the three symptoms that mean you stop and tell somebody?

- If our rule is written in micrograms, why is the AQI on your phone not the answer?

Close with this

Smoke is the one hazard on this site that nobody can point at and everybody is already breathing. Get the number before the shift, not after somebody says they feel rough.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

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TOOLBOX TALK: CONCRETE AND FORMWORK

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Who here has seen a shore that was not quite in contact at the top? Nobody is in trouble. I want to know whether that is something we notice or something we walk past.

The talk

The rule about rebar is one sentence and it is absolute. All protruding reinforcing steel onto and into which employees could fall shall be guarded to eliminate the hazard of impalement. Not most of it. Not the bits near the edge. All of it that anybody could fall onto or into.

Notice what it does not say. It does not say cap it, because a plastic mushroom cap that shatters is not guarding. What eliminates the hazard is a cap rated to take the load, a bent over bar, or a trough over the run, and the standard is written in terms of the outcome so that the answer has to actually work.

Formwork has to be designed, fabricated, erected, supported, braced and maintained so it can carry without failure every vertical and lateral load reasonably anticipated. Lateral matters. A form that would hold the concrete standing still can still go over when the pour pushes sideways or a machine touches a brace.

The drawings have to be at the jobsite, including every revision. If the shoring on this job does not match a drawing somebody can put a hand on, nobody can honestly say the shoring is right, they can only say it has not fallen yet.

Shoring gets inspected three times, and this is the part crews skip. Before erection, to confirm it matches the drawings. Immediately before, during and immediately after the pour. During. That means somebody is watching the shoring while the concrete is going in, and anything found damaged or weakened after erection gets reinforced immediately.

Sills have to be sound and rigid, base plates and shore heads and screws have to be in firm contact and secured where needed, and eccentric loads on shore heads are prohibited unless the member was designed for them. Firm contact is the one to look for, because a shore with a gap at the head is carrying nothing until the deck moves.

Then the short prohibitions that cover the rest of the pour. No employee rides a concrete bucket. Nobody works under a bucket while it is being raised or lowered, and the buckets get routed so the fewest possible people are ever under them. During post tensioning, nobody except the people essential to it is behind the jack, and signs and barriers go up to keep everyone else out of the area.

And before any construction load goes onto a poured structure, somebody qualified in structural design has to say it can carry it. Not the foreman's judgment, and not the fact that it looks cured.

Point at these before anybody starts

- Every piece of protruding rebar anybody on this site could fall onto, and what is on it.

- The formwork drawings, and whether anybody here could produce them in two minutes.

- The shore heads and base plates, checked for actual firm contact.

- The route the bucket takes, and who stands under it.

- The post tensioning area, and whether the barriers are up before the jack runs.

- Any material stacked on a slab poured this week.

The rules that apply

- All protruding reinforcing steel onto and into which employees could fall shall be guarded to eliminate the hazard of impalement.

- Formwork shall be designed, fabricated, erected, supported, braced and maintained so it can support without failure all vertical and lateral loads that may reasonably be anticipated, and the drawings including revisions shall be available at the jobsite.

- Shoring shall be inspected before erection, and erected shoring shall be inspected immediately prior to, during, and immediately after concrete placement, with anything damaged or weakened reinforced immediately.

- Base plates, shore heads, extension devices and adjustment screws shall be in firm contact and secured where necessary, and eccentric loads on shore heads are prohibited unless designed for them.

- No employee shall ride concrete buckets, and no employee shall work under a bucket while it is being raised or lowered.

- During post tensioning no employee other than those essential to the operation shall be behind the jack, and signs and barriers shall limit access to the area.

Ask the crew

- What does the standard require for protruding rebar, and does a cheap plastic cap do it?

- How many times does shoring get inspected around a pour, and when is the one everybody forgets?

- Who is allowed behind the jack during tensioning?

Close with this

Formwork does not sag first. Look at the shores while the truck is still pouring, because after it is a different job.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: MASONRY WALLS

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

How tall is the wall going up today? Add four feet to that number and hold it, because that is the distance we are about to talk about.

The talk

There is one rule in this standard that most masons have never heard said out loud, and it is a distance. A limited access zone shall be established whenever a masonry wall is being constructed. Whenever. Not on tall walls, not on windy days. Whenever.

The zone shall be equal to the height of the wall to be constructed plus four feet, and shall run the entire length of the wall. So a ten foot wall gets a fourteen foot zone, end to end. Not a cone at the corner. A strip the whole length of the work.

It goes on the side of the wall which will be unscaffolded, which is the side nobody is standing on and therefore the side nobody thinks about. That is deliberate. An unbraced wall falls the way nothing is holding it, and the standard puts the empty strip exactly there.

It gets established prior to the start of construction of the wall, not once the wall is tall enough to worry about. Before the first course.

And it is restricted to entry by employees actively engaged in constructing the wall. No other employees shall be permitted to enter the zone. That is everyone else on this site: the laborer fetching block, the electrician running a cable, the man walking through because it is the short way.

The zone stays until the wall is adequately supported to prevent overturning and to prevent collapse. For a wall over eight feet, it stays until the bracing requirement has been met, which is a separate and harder test.

All masonry walls over eight feet in height shall be adequately braced to prevent overturning and to prevent collapse, unless the wall is adequately supported so that it will not overturn or collapse. And the bracing shall remain in place until permanent supporting elements of the structure are in place.

Until the permanent supports are in. Not until the mortar has gone off, not until it looks solid, not until the end of the shift. A green wall braced on Friday and stripped on Monday because the bracing was in the way is the exact scenario the last sentence of this standard was written to stop.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The height of the wall going up, plus four feet, paced out on the unscaffolded side.

- Whether that strip is actually marked, or whether it exists only in a conversation.

- Every trade whose route to work crosses it, and whether anybody has told them.

- Any material, mixer, cart or generator stored inside the zone.

- Every wall over eight feet already standing, and whether its bracing is still there.

- Wind. A partly built wall on an open site is a sail with nothing behind it.

The rules that apply

- A limited access zone shall be established whenever a masonry wall is being constructed, prior to the start of construction of the wall.

- The limited access zone shall be equal to the height of the wall to be constructed plus four feet, shall run the entire length of the wall, and shall be established on the side of the wall which will be unscaffolded.

- The limited access zone shall be restricted to entry by employees actively engaged in constructing the wall. No other employees shall be permitted to enter the zone.

- The zone shall remain in place until the wall is adequately supported to prevent overturning and collapse, and where the wall is over eight feet, until the bracing requirement has been met.

- All masonry walls over eight feet in height shall be adequately braced to prevent overturning and collapse unless adequately supported, and the bracing shall remain in place until permanent supporting elements of the structure are in place.

Ask the crew

- How wide is the zone for the wall we are building, and which side does it go on?

- Who is allowed inside it?

- When can the bracing come off a nine foot wall?

Close with this

Height plus four, the whole length, the empty side. Then nobody is standing where it lands.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

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TOOLBOX TALK: ELECTRICAL SAFETY

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Question for everybody before we start. Is there anything on this site you are going to touch today that you assume is not live? Say it out loud, because that assumption is the whole talk.

The talk

Electricity is one of the Focus Four, the four hazards that account for most construction deaths: falls, struck by, caught in between, and electrocution. Electrocution is the one that gives you the least warning.

It does not take much. Fifty milliamps across the chest is enough to stop a heart, which is a fraction of what a single power tool draws. The voltage that kills people on residential jobs is the ordinary one hundred and twenty volts coming out of every outlet in the house.

The rule is assume everything is live until you have tested it yourself with a meter you trust. Not because somebody told you, not because the breaker is labeled, not because the tag is on the panel. Labels on residential panels are wrong often enough that treating them as fact is a coin toss.

Overhead lines are the outdoor version. Ladders, scaffold frames, gutters being carried by two people, a load on a boom. Ten feet is the minimum clearance for lines up to fifty kV, and a service drop to a house is not something to duck under with an aluminum ladder on your shoulder.

Panels get covers. Open panels, missing breaker knockouts and open junction boxes are how a screwdriver, a piece of wire or a finger finds a bus bar. If the cover is off because work is in progress, the area is barricaded and somebody owns it.

And water changes everything. Wet hands, wet boots, standing in a puddle, working in a crawl space after rain. Water drops your resistance and turns a shock you would have walked away from into a shock that does not let go.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The panel or panels on this job, and whether the covers are on

- Overhead service drops and lines above anywhere we are carrying long material

- Any temporary wiring, and how it is supported and protected

- Open junction boxes, missing knockouts and exposed conductors

- Wet areas, crawl spaces and anywhere standing water meets a cord

- Who has a working voltage tester on them right now

The rules that apply

- Treat every conductor as energized until you personally verify it is dead with a tester, then verify the tester on a known live source.

- Only qualified persons work on or near exposed energized parts.

- Keep at least 10 feet of clearance between any part of the body, tool, ladder or load and overhead lines up to 50 kV.

- Panel covers, box covers and knockouts stay in place except while work is in progress, and the area is guarded while they are off.

- Never work on energized circuits in wet conditions, and keep temporary wiring out of water and off the ground where it can be.

- Report any shock, however small, immediately. A tingle from a tool is a fault, not a quirk.

Ask the crew

- If you get a small shock off a tool today, what are you going to do about it?

- What is the longest thing we are carrying today, and what is above where we are carrying it?

- Which circuits on this job have we actually tested, as opposed to assumed?

Close with this

Nothing is dead until you tested it yourself. Ten feet from anything overhead. Covers back on before you walk away.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: LOCKOUT AND TAGOUT

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Whose lock is on what right now? If anybody is working on something that can be switched on by somebody else, we are stopping until there is a lock on it with a name on it.

The talk

The basic idea is simple. Anything that can start moving, energize, heat up or release pressure while you have your hands in it must be isolated, locked, tagged and verified dead before you start.

The lock is yours and the key is in your pocket. Not the foreman's lock, not a shared lock in the gang box, not a tag on its own. If three people are working on the same equipment, three locks go on, and the last one off is the last person out.

A tag without a lock only works where the isolating device cannot physically accept a lock, and then the tag has to be substantial, attached at the point of control and treated as if it were a lock. In practice, if it can take a lock, it takes a lock.

Stored energy is what catches people. The breaker is off but there is a capacitor still charged, air still in the line, a spring still loaded, a suspended part that drops when the hydraulics bleed off, or water still in a system at pressure. Release it, block it, bleed it or restrain it before you trust it.

Then verify. Try to start it. Put the meter on it. Bleed the line and watch the gauge go to zero. Verification is the step that separates lockout from hope, and it is the step people skip because they are already sure.

Getting it back on is the other half. Tools out, guards back on, everybody clear and told, then locks come off in order by the people who put them on. Nobody removes somebody else's lock. Not the foreman, not the owner, nobody, except under a documented procedure with the person accounted for.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The disconnect or breaker for each piece of equipment being worked on today

- Whose lock and tag is on it, with a name that can be read from six feet away

- Any stored energy: air receivers, hydraulic rams, springs, capacitors, raised loads

- The verification step, done in front of everybody, not described

- Where the locks and tags are kept, and whether there are enough for everyone

- Who is responsible for the startup sequence when the work is finished

The rules that apply

- Every person working on the equipment applies their own lock and keeps their own key.

- Isolate every energy source, not just the obvious one. Electrical, pneumatic, hydraulic, mechanical, thermal and gravity all count.

- Release or restrain stored energy before work begins, then verify zero energy by attempting to operate the controls or by testing.

- Tags without locks are only for isolating devices that cannot be locked, and they must be attached at the point of control.

- Nobody removes another person's lock. Restoring power follows a set sequence with everybody accounted for and clear.

- Tell anybody working nearby before you re energize, every time, out loud.

Ask the crew

- Who is going to have their hands inside something today that can move or energize?

- What is the second energy source on that machine, the one that is not the breaker?

- When we put power back on this afternoon, who says it is clear and how do they know?

Close with this

Your lock, your key, your hands. Verify it is dead before you touch it, and tell everyone before it comes back on.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: NAIL GUN SAFETY

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Pick up your gun and look at the trigger. Sequential or contact trip? That answer changes your odds of ending up in the emergency room this year, and we are going to talk about why.

The talk

There are two firing modes. Sequential means the safety tip has to be pressed first, then the trigger, one nail per pull. Contact trip, what everybody calls bump firing, means the trigger can be held down and the gun fires every time the tip touches something.

Bump firing is faster on a deck or a sheathing wall and it is where most of the injuries come from. Research on residential framers has consistently found roughly double the injury rate with contact trip triggers compared with sequential. That is the number that should decide this for us.

The classic injury is the double fire. The recoil bounces the tip off the work and back onto it while the trigger is still down, and a second nail goes somewhere you did not intend, often into a hand holding the piece. It happens faster than you can react.

The second classic is nailing toward your own hand. Toe nailing, hanging a hanger, holding a block, nailing near the edge of a stud where the nail deflects off a knot and comes out the side. Keep your non nailing hand at least a hand span away from the point of impact, and use a clamp or a block if you cannot.

Then there is the one nobody counts: the gun left on the deck with air connected, the gun carried up a ladder with a finger on the trigger, the gun set down on a platform where it can fall. Disconnect the air before you clear a jam, before you carry it up anything, before you leave it.

And never point it at anybody, even in a joke, even disconnected. The number of nail gun injuries that begin with horseplay is not small and it is exactly the kind of injury nobody has a good explanation for afterward.

Point at these before anybody starts

- Which trigger each gun on this site has, sequential or contact trip

- Where the non nailing hand sits on a toe nail or a hanger

- The air hose, its connections and whether anything is leaking

- Where guns are being set down, and whether the air is connected

- The safety tip on each gun, checking it is present and moves freely

- Eye protection on every person within range of a ricochet

The rules that apply

- Use sequential trigger guns wherever the work allows it, especially for toe nailing, hangers, blocking and any work near a hand.

- Keep the non nailing hand at least a hand span from the firing point, or use a clamp instead of a hand.

- Disconnect the air before clearing a jam, changing a tip, adjusting depth, carrying the gun up a ladder or setting it down for a break.

- Never disable the safety contact tip and never hold the trigger while walking or climbing.

- Eye protection meeting ANSI Z87.1 for the operator and anybody within range of a ricocheting nail.

- Report every nail gun injury, including one that went through and came out, because an untreated puncture gets infected.

Ask the crew

- Who here has been hit or nearly hit by a nail this year, and what was the gun doing?

- Where on this job today is somebody going to be nailing near their own hand?

- Which of our guns could be switched to a sequential trigger this week?

Close with this

Sequential where you can, hand clear, air off before you touch the tip. A nail through a hand is a month, not an afternoon.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

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TOOLBOX TALK: FIRST AID ON SITE

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Two questions and I want real answers. Who here holds a current first aid certificate? And what is the address of this site, including the bit an ambulance would need?

The talk

The trigger for having a trained first aider is not crew size, which is what everybody assumes. It is distance. In the absence of an infirmary, clinic, hospital or physician that is reasonably accessible in terms of time and distance to the worksite, a person with a valid certificate in first aid training shall be available at the worksite to render first aid.

Reasonably accessible in terms of time and distance. That is a judgment about this gate and this traffic, and it is the employer's judgment to make and defend. A rural job forty minutes from anywhere is a different answer from a job four blocks from an emergency room.

Two things happen before the job even starts. The employer shall ensure the availability of medical personnel for advice and consultation on matters of occupational health, and provisions shall be made prior to commencement of the project for prompt medical attention in case of serious injury. Before. Not worked out on the day.

The kit has rules most people have never read. First aid supplies shall be easily accessible when required, the contents shall be in a weatherproof container with individual sealed packages for each type of item, and the employer shall check it before it goes out on each job and at least weekly on each job, replacing whatever has been used.

Weekly. That is the line that turns a kit from a box with two plasters and a dried out eye wash into something that works. Somebody has to own that check and it should be a name, not a role.

Getting help in is its own requirement. There has to be proper equipment for prompt transport to a physician or hospital, or a communication system for contacting an ambulance. Where 911 is not available, the numbers for physicians, hospitals or ambulances are posted conspicuously.

And where 911 is available, there is a modern rule worth knowing. The employer must ensure the communication system actually works for reaching emergency medical services, and where the system does not automatically give the dispatcher the caller's latitude and longitude, the worksite must post either its latitude and longitude or other location information that tells employees effectively where they are. A mobile call from a half built structure on an unnamed road is exactly the case that rule was written for.

One more thing, because it gets asked every time. The bloodborne pathogens standard, 1910.1030, does not apply to construction work. OSHA said so and has not changed it. What OSHA also said, in the same breath, is that this does not mean construction is free of the hazard: the General Duty Clause still applies, 1926.21(b)(2) requires the employer to train designated first aid providers in the hazards of bloodborne pathogens, and 1926.25 requires containers for the collection and separation of waste, which includes sharps and other hazardous waste from rendering medical assistance.

So whoever on this crew is the one who would go to somebody who is bleeding needs gloves within reach, needs to have been told what the risk is, and needs somewhere to put what comes off afterwards.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The first aid kit. Open it now, and look at the dates.

- The last date anybody checked it, and the name of the person who owns that check.

- The site address and, if there is no address, the latitude and longitude posted somewhere visible.

- Whoever holds a current certificate, by name, and whether they are on site today.

- The nearest emergency room, and how long it actually takes at this time of day.

- Gloves, and whether the person most likely to help somebody has a pair on them.

The rules that apply

- The employer shall ensure the availability of medical personnel for advice and consultation on matters of occupational health, and provisions shall be made prior to commencement of the project for prompt medical attention in case of serious injury.

- In the absence of an infirmary, clinic, hospital or physician reasonably accessible in terms of time and distance, a person with a valid first aid certificate shall be available at the worksite to render first aid.

- First aid supplies shall be easily accessible, in a weatherproof container with individual sealed packages for each type of item, checked before being sent out on each job and at least weekly on each job.

- Proper equipment for prompt transportation to a physician or hospital, or a communication system for contacting an ambulance, shall be provided.

- Where 911 is unavailable, the telephone numbers of physicians, hospitals or ambulances shall be conspicuously posted. Where 911 is used and the system does not automatically supply the caller's latitude and longitude, the worksite shall post its latitude and longitude or other effective location information.

- 1910.1030 does not apply to construction work, but 1926.21(b)(2) requires the employer to train designated first aid providers in the hazards of bloodborne pathogens, and 1926.25 requires containers for the collection and separation of waste including sharps.

Ask the crew

- Who on this site is trained, and are they here today?

- When was the kit last checked, and by whom?

- If you rang 911 from where you are standing, what would you tell them about where you are?

Close with this

Open the kit. Whatever you find in it is what somebody gets on the worst day of their life.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

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TOOLBOX TALK: FIRE AND HOT WORK

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Who is welding, cutting, soldering, torching or grinding today? That is hot work. Before any of it starts, we walk the area and we agree who is watching it afterward.

The talk

Hot work is anything that makes sparks, flame or enough heat to ignite something: welding, torch cutting, abrasive cutting, soldering, brazing, heat guns and roofing torches.

Sparks travel further than anybody expects. Thirty five feet is the standard clearance around hot work, and sparks roll, bounce and fall through gaps. Move combustibles out of that radius or cover them with a rated blanket, and close up openings in floors and walls within it.

The killer detail is concealed spaces. A spark that drops into a stud bay, a chase, a soffit or under a roof deck smolders for hours in insulation or sawdust and then breaks out at nine in the evening. That is why the fire watch continues after the tool is off.

Keep the fire watch in place for at least thirty minutes after the last spark, with an extinguisher in hand and eyes on the area, including the far side of any wall or floor that was worked on. Most jobsite hot work permits follow NFPA 51B on this and some require sixty minutes.

Extinguishers. Know where they are, know what class they are, and know they were checked. The rule of thumb is one within one hundred feet of travel for each three thousand square feet of protected area, and any hot work has one within reach, not down two floors.

Fuel and gas. Cylinders stored upright and secured, caps on when not in use, oxygen kept twenty feet from fuel gas or separated by a rated barrier, gasoline in approved safety cans only, and nothing refueled while hot or running.

And the last one, the exit. If a fire starts, everybody needs to know where they are going. Exits and routes stay clear, which is another reason housekeeping is a fire talk as much as a trip talk.

Point at these before anybody starts

- What hot work is happening today and exactly where

- The 35 foot radius around it, and every combustible inside that radius

- Openings, cracks, chases and stud bays sparks could fall into

- The extinguisher, its class, its gauge and its inspection tag

- Who is the fire watch, and how long they stay after the work stops

- Fuel and gas cylinder storage, secured, upright and separated

The rules that apply

- Move combustibles at least 35 feet from hot work, or shield them with a rated fire blanket.

- Cover or close openings, cracks and chases where sparks could fall into a concealed space.

- A fire watch stays in place during the work and for at least 30 minutes after the last spark, on both sides of any wall or floor worked on.

- An appropriate extinguisher stays within immediate reach of the hot work, checked and in date.

- Store compressed gas cylinders upright and secured with caps on, oxygen separated from fuel gas by 20 feet or a rated barrier.

- Gasoline only in approved safety cans, and no refueling of hot or running equipment.

Ask the crew

- Where exactly are the sparks going to land today?

- Who is the fire watch, and what time can they leave?

- If there is a fire in this building right now, where does everybody go?

Close with this

Thirty five feet clear, openings covered, extinguisher in reach, and the fire watch stays half an hour after the last spark.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: CRANES AND RIGGING

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Before anything gets picked today I want everyone to tell me where the fall zone is. Not where the crane is. Where the load ends up if the rigging lets go.

The talk

A crane lift looks like the operator's job. It is not. The operator can only see what the signal person shows him, and the load only knows one direction, which is down.

The fall zone is the area the load would land in if it came off the hook right now. It is not a line on the ground and nobody paints it. It moves with the load, the whole way across the site.

The rule is that while the load is hanging and not moving, nobody is in that zone. There are exceptions and they are short: the people hooking it, unhooking it, guiding it, making the first connection, and whoever is running a concrete hopper or bucket. That is the whole list.

If you are one of those people, the load has to be rigged so it cannot shift, and the hooks have to latch by themselves. A hook that is open at the top is a load that is waiting for a bump.

The other thing that kills on crane jobs is the power line. It does not take contact. It takes getting close enough, with a boom, a load line, a tag line, or a piece of rigging.

Before the first pick, somebody has to work out whether any part of this machine or its load can get within twenty feet of a line at full radius. If the answer is yes, the line gets deenergized and visibly grounded, or the twenty feet gets enforced. Standing there hoping is not one of the options.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The power line nearest this pick, and how far the boom reaches at full radius.

- Where the load will travel, from where it sits now to where it lands.

- The fall zone under that whole route, and who is currently standing in it.

- The hook, and whether the latch closes by itself when you let go of it.

- The tag line, and who is holding it and where they will be standing.

- The signal person, and whether every one of you can see the same person.

The rules that apply

- While a suspended load is not moving, nobody is in the fall zone except the people hooking, unhooking, guiding or making the first connection, or running a concrete hopper or bucket.

- Materials being hoisted must be rigged so they cannot shift on the way up.

- Hooks used in the fall zone must have self closing latches or the equivalent. J hooks are allowed only for setting wooden trusses.

- Where more than one hoisting route is available, the one that keeps people out from under the load is the one used.

- Before operations start, the employer must work out whether any part of the equipment, load line or load can get closer than 20 feet to a power line at maximum working radius.

- If it can, the line is deenergized and visibly grounded, or the 20 feet is maintained by the measures the standard requires. Nothing else clears it.

Ask the crew

- Point at where the fall zone is for the first pick today.

- Who is the signal person, and what do you do if you lose sight of them?

- How close does the boom get to that line at full radius?

Close with this

If you are under it, you are in it. The load does not care whose fault it was.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: STEEL ERECTION

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

What is the fall protection trigger height on this job? If anybody said six feet, this talk is for them, because subpart R is a different rule and we are working under it.

The talk

Start with the number, because it is the source of every argument. In steel erection, each employee on a walking or working surface with an unprotected side or edge more than 15 feet above a lower level shall be protected. Fifteen, not six. Subpart R, not subpart M.

That does not make 15 feet safe. It is a rule written around the reality that a connector cannot always be tied off to steel that is not there yet, and it comes with conditions attached to buy that. The conditions are the rest of this talk.

The protection itself is the normal list: guardrail systems, safety net systems, personal fall arrest, positioning device systems or fall restraint systems. And all of it has to meet the criteria in 1926.502, which is subpart M. The equipment standard does not change. Only the trigger height does.

Perimeter safety cables. On multi story structures, perimeter safety cables shall be installed at the final interior and exterior perimeters of the floors as soon as the metal decking has been installed. As soon as. That is a same day duty, not a snagging item.

Connectors get their own rule and it is narrow. A connector is protected from fall hazards of more than two stories or 30 feet above a lower level, whichever is less. Between 15 and 30 feet a connector must be provided with a personal fall arrest, positioning device or fall restraint system and must wear the equipment necessary to be able to tie off. Provided with it and wearing it. Whether every steel gives him somewhere to clip is the argument, and the kit being on him is not.

And a connector has to have completed connector training in accordance with 1926.761. The exemption belongs to a trained connector doing connecting work. It does not belong to anybody who happens to be up there.

The controlled decking zone is the other exception and it has hard edges. A CDZ may be established over 15 and up to 30 feet above a lower level where metal decking is initially being installed and forms the leading edge. Access is limited to employees engaged in leading edge work, everybody in it has completed CDZ training, and the boundaries are designated and clearly marked with control lines.

The CDZ has three numbers worth memorising. It shall not be more than 90 feet wide and 90 feet deep from any leading edge. Unsecured decking in it shall not exceed 3,000 square feet. And safety deck attachments run from the leading edge back to the control line with at least two attachments for each decking panel. Final deck attachments and shear connectors are not done in the CDZ at all.

Last one, and it is the one that catches the trades who come after us. Fall protection the steel erector put up stays for other trades only if the controlling contractor has directed the steel erector to leave it, and has inspected and accepted control and responsibility for it before anybody other than steel erectors works in that area. Nobody inherits a guardrail by finding it there.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The trigger height everybody on this job thinks applies, asked out loud.

- Perimeter cables on every floor where the decking is already down.

- Who is a trained connector today, by name, and who is just working at height.

- Whether the men between 15 and 30 feet are wearing the kit, not whether it is in the gangbox.

- The CDZ control lines, and whether the zone is still inside 90 by 90.

- How much unsecured decking is out there right now against the 3,000 square foot limit.

The rules that apply

- Each employee engaged in a steel erection activity on a walking or working surface with an unprotected side or edge more than 15 feet above a lower level shall be protected by guardrail, safety net, personal fall arrest, positioning device or fall restraint systems, except for connectors and employees in controlled decking zones.

- On multi story structures, perimeter safety cables shall be installed at the final interior and exterior perimeters of the floors as soon as the metal decking has been installed.

- Each connector shall be protected from fall hazards of more than two stories or 30 feet, whichever is less, shall have completed connector training in accordance with 1926.761, and at heights over 15 and up to 30 feet shall be provided with and wear equipment necessary to be able to tie off.

- A controlled decking zone shall be no more than 90 feet wide and 90 feet deep from any leading edge, shall be clearly marked by control lines, shall be entered only by trained employees engaged in leading edge work, and shall contain no more than 3,000 square feet of unsecured decking.

- Guardrail, safety net, personal fall arrest and positioning device systems used in steel erection shall conform to the criteria in 1926.502.

- Fall protection provided by the steel erector remains for other trades only if the controlling contractor has directed that it be left in place and has inspected and accepted control and responsibility for it beforehand.

Ask the crew

- What is the trigger height in steel erection, and what is it under subpart M?

- What are the two things a connector between 15 and 30 feet must have?

- The steel is done and the guardrail is still up. Can the next trade use it?

Close with this

Fifteen feet is not a license, it is a trade off with conditions. Know which of them apply to you today.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: FORKLIFTS AND TELEHANDLERS

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Somebody read me the rated capacity off the machine. It has to be posted where the operator can see it. If you cannot find it, that is today's first problem.

The talk

The rated capacity has to be posted on the machine, clearly visible to the operator. If counterweights can be removed, the capacity with them off has to be marked too.

That number is not one number. On a telehandler it is a chart, and the weight it can hold drops fast as the boom goes out. The same load that is fine at ten feet will put the machine on its nose at thirty.

Tipping forward is what happens when the load goes out too far. Tipping sideways is what happens on a slope or in a turn, and it happens faster because there is nothing counterweighting it.

Nobody rides on the forks and nobody rides on the load. If people have to be lifted, that is a different machine or a purpose built platform that is secured to the carriage, and it is a different conversation than this one.

Scissor points on a loader will take a hand off. They are guarded where they are a hazard in normal operation, and if the guard is missing the machine does not run.

Seat belts are on this equipment for rollover. In a rollover the instinct is to jump, and jumping is how operators end up underneath the cab they would have survived inside.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The rated capacity plate. Find it and read the number out loud.

- The load chart in the cab, and the boom angle it is talking about.

- The ground where the machine will set the load down, and whether it is level.

- The forks, and whether the load is against the backrest or hanging off the tips.

- The scissor points on the loader, and whether the guard is still there.

- The seat belt in that cab, and whether it is fastened behind the operator.

The rules that apply

- Lift trucks, stackers and similar equipment must have the rated capacity clearly posted so the operator can see it, including capacity with auxiliary removable counterweights taken off.

- Seat belts must be provided on equipment covered by this section, with the narrow exceptions for standup only machines and machines with no rollover protection or canopy.

- A tractor keeps its seat belt requirement even when a backhoe, breaker or similar attachment is fitted to it.

- Scissor points on front-end loaders that are a hazard to the operator during normal operation must be guarded.

- Rollover protective structures and overhead protection are required as set out in subpart W of Part 1926.

- Bidirectional machines must have a working horn distinguishable from the surrounding noise, and equipment with an obstructed rear view is not reversed without a working reverse alarm or someone signaling it is safe.

Ask the crew

- What is the capacity of that machine at full extension, not at rest?

- Where does the load go if the machine starts to tip forward?

- Who is allowed to ride on the forks?

Close with this

Read the chart, not the machine. The machine will lift things it cannot hold.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: CONFINED SPACES

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Nobody goes into anything today that you have to climb into and cannot walk straight out of, until we have had this conversation. That includes the vault, the manhole and the crawlspace.

The talk

A confined space is three things at once: big enough to get into and work, not designed for people to stay in, and with a way in or out that is restricted. A trench with a ramp is not one. A vault with a ladder is.

It becomes a permit space when it also has one of four problems: a hazardous atmosphere, material that could swallow you, walls or a floor that slope to a smaller cross section, or any other serious hazard inside.

Hazardous atmosphere has numbers and you should know them. Oxygen below 19.5 percent or above 23.5 percent. Flammable gas or vapor above 10 percent of its lower flammable limit. Combustible dust thick enough that you cannot see five feet.

You cannot detect any of that. Oxygen displacement gives no warning at all, and the first symptom of the atmosphere that kills you is that you stop being able to decide to leave.

So the space gets tested before entry and monitored while people are in it, it gets ventilated, and somebody stays outside the whole time doing nothing else. That attendant is not helping and not fetching. His job is to stay at the hole and count the people in it.

The part everybody has to hear is the rescue part. If a man goes down inside, you do not go in. Rescue from a permit space is done by people with air on their backs and a retrieval line, and the reason that rule exists is a list of second bodies.

Point at these before anybody starts

- Every space on this site you would have to climb into. Name them out loud.

- The entry point, and how a person on a stretcher would come back out of it.

- The gas monitor, and when it was last bump tested.

- The blower and the ducting, and where its intake is drawing air from.

- Where the attendant stands, and what he is holding.

- The permit sign, and whether anything on this site is posted.

The rules that apply

- Before work starts, a competent person identifies every confined space on the site and decides which of them are permit spaces.

- Permit spaces are posted with danger signs, and the controlling contractor and the other employers on site are told where they are.

- Anyone who is not authorized to enter a permit space must be effectively prevented from entering it.

- If employees are going in, there is a written permit space program on the site, available for inspection before and during entry.

- The atmosphere is tested and monitored: oxygen between 19.5 and 23.5 percent, flammable gas or vapor below 10 percent of its lower flammable limit, and no contaminant above its exposure limit.

- Nobody enters to rescue. Rescue is done by the trained, equipped rescuers named in the permit, and entrants are on a retrieval system where one can be used.

Ask the crew

- Which spaces on this job are confined spaces, and which of those need a permit?

- What does the attendant do if you stop answering him?

- What happens if you see somebody collapse inside?

Close with this

The space that killed the first man is still exactly as dangerous when the second one climbs in.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: DRIVING AND VEHICLE CHECKS

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Hands up who checked their brakes, tires and horn before leaving the yard this morning. That check is not a suggestion, it is a requirement, and it is once a shift.

The talk

Every vehicle in use on this job gets checked at the beginning of each shift. Not weekly, not when something feels wrong. Each shift, before it is used.

The list is written down in the standard and it is short: brakes including the trailer connection, the hand brake, the emergency stopping system, tires, horn, steering, coupling devices, seat belts, controls and safety devices.

Seat belts have to be installed in every motor vehicle, and the reason people still die not wearing one on a jobsite is that the drive is short. Every fatal jobsite drive was a short one.

Backing is where the trucks on a site actually hurt people. You either have a reverse alarm that can be heard over the noise around it, or you have somebody watching who signals that it is safe. One or the other, every time.

The phone is the part nobody wants to talk about. Reading one message at thirty miles an hour means driving the length of this site with your eyes shut. There is no version of that which is fine because the message was quick.

Cracked glass and dead wipers are the two defects everybody drives with for months. You cannot see out of a windshield you have stopped looking through, and a wiper that smears is the reason a reversing truck does not see a man in a vest.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The vehicle you drove in. Walk to it and look at the tires now.

- Any cracked windshield or split wiper blade on the vehicles here.

- Where trucks reverse on this site, and who has been standing in that spot.

- The coupling on any trailer here, and the safety chains.

- The horn. Somebody sound it, so everybody knows what it sounds like.

- The load in the bed, and whether it is tied or just sitting there.

The rules that apply

- Every vehicle in use is checked at the start of each shift: service brakes including trailer brake connections, parking brake, emergency stopping system, tires, horn, steering, coupling devices, seat belts, operating controls and safety devices.

- Seat belts and anchorages meeting the federal motor vehicle safety standards must be installed in all motor vehicles, and they get worn.

- Service brake, emergency brake and parking brake systems all have to be there and all have to be kept in working condition.

- A vehicle is backed up only when it has a reverse signal alarm audible above the surrounding noise, or when an observer signals that it is safe to do so.

- Vehicles with cabs must have windshields and powered wipers. Cracked and broken glass gets replaced, and where windshields fog or frost the defroster has to work.

- Haulage vehicles loaded by a crane, shovel or loader must have a cab shield or canopy adequate to protect the operator from shifting or falling material.

Ask the crew

- What is on the start of shift check, without looking at the sheet?

- Who checks the trailer coupling, the man who hitched it or the man driving it?

- Where is your phone going to be while you drive off this site?

Close with this

The check takes two minutes and it is the only part of the day that protects you before anything has gone wrong.

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TOOLBOX TALK: DEMOLITION

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Before anything else: has anybody here seen the engineering survey for this building? Not been told about it. Seen it. It has to exist in writing before a single wall comes down.

The talk

The first requirement comes before demolition starts. An engineering survey shall be made by a competent person of the structure, to determine the condition of the framing, floors and walls and the possibility of unplanned collapse of any portion of it. Any adjacent structure where employees may be exposed gets checked the same way.

And the employer shall have in writing evidence that such a survey has been performed. In writing. That line is the difference between a survey and somebody having had a look, and it is the first thing an inspector asks for after an incident.

If the building has been damaged by fire, flood, explosion or anything else, and people have to work inside it, the walls or floor shall be shored or braced. A damaged structure is not the same job as a sound one and it does not get the same plan.

Every service line goes off before work starts: electric, gas, water, steam, sewer and anything else, shut off, capped or otherwise controlled outside the building line, and the utility company gets told in advance in each case. Anything that must stay live gets temporarily relocated as necessary and protected.

Then the part that kills people who did everything else right. It has to be determined whether hazardous chemicals, gases, explosives or flammable materials have been used in any pipes, tanks or equipment on the property, and where that is apparent or suspected, testing and purging happen and the hazard is eliminated before demolition starts. A cutting torch into an old tank is a complete story with one ending.

Openings are the day to day risk. Where anybody could fall through a wall opening it gets protected to a height of about 42 inches. Floor openings not used as material drops get covered with material strong enough to carry any load that could land on it, secured so it cannot shift.

Where debris is dropped through a hole without a chute, the area below is completely enclosed with barricades at least 42 inches high and at least 6 feet back from the projected edge of the opening above, with warning signs posted at every level. Nobody works in that lower area until the dropping stops upstairs.

And glass. Where a hazard exists from fragmentation of glass, that hazard shall be removed. Not taped, not avoided. Removed, before the machine gets near it.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The written engineering survey. Ask where it is and who the competent person was.

- Every utility, and how anybody here knows it is actually dead rather than switched off somewhere.

- Any tank, drum or pipe on site that nobody can say what was in it.

- Every floor opening, and whether its cover would hold a loaded barrow.

- The drop zone below any material hole: barricades, distance, signs.

- Any glazing still in a wall that is coming down today.

The rules that apply

- Prior to permitting employees to start demolition operations, an engineering survey shall be made by a competent person of the structure to determine the condition of the framing, floors and walls and the possibility of unplanned collapse, and of any adjacent structure where employees may be exposed. The employer shall have written evidence that the survey was performed.

- Where employees must work inside a structure damaged by fire, flood, explosion or other cause, the walls or floor shall be shored or braced.

- All electric, gas, water, steam, sewer and other service lines shall be shut off, capped or otherwise controlled outside the building line before demolition starts, with the utility company notified in advance.

- Where hazardous chemicals, gases, explosives or flammable materials are apparent or suspected in pipes, tanks or equipment, testing and purging shall be performed and the hazard eliminated before demolition starts.

- Wall openings through which employees could fall shall be protected to a height of approximately 42 inches, and floor openings not used as material drops shall be covered with material substantial enough to support any imposed load and secured against movement.

- Where debris is dropped through holes without chutes, the area below shall be completely enclosed with barricades at least 42 inches high and at least 6 feet back from the projected edge of the opening, with warning signs at each level, and no removal below until debris handling above has stopped.

Ask the crew

- Who did the engineering survey on this building, and where is the written evidence of it?

- Which utilities are confirmed dead, and confirmed by whom?

- Where is the drop zone, and who is allowed in it while material is coming down?

Close with this

Everything on this job is designed to fall down. The only question is whether it does it on the day somebody chose.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

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TOOLBOX TALK: LEAD PAINT IN RENOVATION

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

How old is this house? If the answer is before 1978 or you do not know, we are working lead safe today, and that starts before the first piece of trim comes off.

The talk

Lead paint was in use in American housing until it was banned for residential use in 1978. The older the house, the more likely it is and the higher the concentration. The hazard is almost never the intact paint. It is the dust and chips made when it is disturbed.

Two sets of rules apply at once. OSHA 1926.62 protects the worker, with exposure limits, monitoring and hygiene requirements. The EPA Renovation, Repair and Painting rule protects the occupants, and it applies to work for compensation in pre 1978 housing and child occupied facilities where you disturb more than six square feet of interior paint, twenty square feet of exterior, or replace a window.

Under RRP, the firm has to be EPA certified, the work has to be supervised by a certified renovator, the occupants have to get the lead pamphlet, and the records have to be kept. Fines for doing it without that are not small.

Three methods are prohibited outright: open flame burning or torching, machine sanding or grinding without HEPA exhaust control, and heat guns above eleven hundred degrees Fahrenheit. Dry scraping and dry sanding are how most of the dust gets made, so wet methods and HEPA attachments are the working answer.

Containment. Plastic on the floor extending out from the work, doors and vents sealed, no occupants in the area, signs up, and the plastic folded inward and disposed of properly at the end. Everything that comes out of the room comes out through that containment.

Hygiene is the part that goes home with you. No eating, drinking or smoking in the work area, wash hands and face before breaks and before leaving, change out of work clothes, and do not take dusty clothes home to be washed with the family laundry. Children in the house of a remodeler have been poisoned this way.

And cleanup. HEPA vacuum, wet wipe, HEPA vacuum again. A shop vac without a HEPA filter blows lead dust straight back into the room, in a finer form than it started.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The age of this building, and whether a lead test has been done

- The containment: plastic, sealed doors and vents, and the signs

- The tools: HEPA shrouds, wet methods, and nothing that burns or dry sands

- The hand wash station, and where people are eating and drinking

- The waste bags, and how the plastic is coming out at the end

- Who here has small children at home, because the clothing rule matters most to them

The rules that apply

- Treat paint in pre 1978 housing as lead containing unless testing shows otherwise.

- RRP applies to work for compensation disturbing more than 6 square feet interior, 20 square feet exterior, or any window replacement in pre 1978 target housing.

- Prohibited: open flame burning, machine sanding or grinding without HEPA control, and heat guns above 1100 degrees Fahrenheit.

- Contain the work area with plastic, seal doors and vents, keep occupants out and post warning signs.

- Wash hands and face before eating, drinking, smoking or leaving. Change clothes and never take work clothing home to wash with family laundry.

- Clean with HEPA vacuum and wet methods only. A standard shop vac makes it worse.

Ask the crew

- Has this house been tested, and if not, why are we treating it as anything other than lead?

- Where is the hand wash station and where are people eating lunch today?

- Who has young kids at home and is changing clothes before they get in the truck?

Close with this

Pre 1978 means lead safe work. Contain it, wet it, HEPA it, and wash before you eat or drive home.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: ASBESTOS AWARENESS

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

How old is the building we are in? If the answer is 1980 or earlier, then some of what is in it is legally presumed to be asbestos until somebody proves otherwise, and that changes what today looks like.

The talk

Start with the presumption, because it is the part that decides what a crew does. Presumed asbestos containing material means thermal system insulation and surfacing material found in buildings constructed no later than 1980. That is a legal presumption, not a guess, and it stands until it is rebutted properly.

So pipe lagging and sprayed or troweled surfacing in a building of that age is treated as asbestos by default. Nobody has to prove it is asbestos. Somebody has to prove it is not, and that proof is a specific procedure, not an opinion from the man holding the saw.

The limits are small numbers and worth hearing out loud. No employee may be exposed above 0.1 fiber per cubic centimeter of air as an eight hour time weighted average, and no employee may be exposed above 1.0 fiber per cubic centimeter averaged over any thirty minute period. A fiber you can see is not the one that gets into the deep lung.

Work gets sorted into four classes. Class I is removing thermal system insulation and surfacing material, the worst. Class II is removing other asbestos containing material such as wallboard, floor tile and sheeting, roofing and siding shingles, and mastics. Class III is repair and maintenance where such material is likely to be disturbed. Class IV is cleaning up after the other three, or contacting the material without disturbing it.

Three controls apply to every operation covered by the standard, at any measured exposure level, with no exceptions for small jobs. HEPA filtered vacuums to collect all debris and dust. Wet methods or wetting agents during handling, mixing, removal, cutting, application and cleanup. Prompt cleanup and disposal in leak tight containers.

And four things are flatly prohibited, whatever the air monitoring says. High speed abrasive disc saws without a point of cut ventilator or HEPA filtered enclosure. Compressed air to remove the material, unless it is inside an enclosed ventilation system built to catch the cloud. Dry sweeping, shoveling or other dry cleanup. And rotating employees to spread the exposure around, which is the oldest trick there is and is named in the standard as banned.

All Class I work, including the setting up and running of the control system, is supervised by a competent person, and there is a threshold everybody should know: more than 25 linear feet or 10 square feet of thermal system insulation or surfacing material puts a Class I job into its own tighter set of requirements.

What this means on a normal day is simple. If the building is old and you are about to cut, drill, sand, break or sweep something you cannot identify, that is where the work stops and somebody makes a phone call. Nobody on this crew loses anything by stopping. The exposure is silent, there is no bad smell and no cough on the day, and the bill arrives thirty years later.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The age of this building, and whether anybody has produced a survey for it.

- Any pipe lagging, boiler insulation or sprayed ceiling anywhere in the work area.

- Floor tile, mastic, artex, soffit board, cement sheet, corrugated roofing on an old structure.

- Any broom on this site anywhere near material nobody has identified.

- The HEPA vacuum, if there is one, and whether the filter has ever been changed.

- Who the crew rings when something turns up, and whether that number is in a phone here.

The rules that apply

- Presumed asbestos containing material means thermal system insulation and surfacing material found in buildings constructed no later than 1980, and that designation may be rebutted only under paragraph (k)(5).

- No employee shall be exposed above 0.1 fiber per cubic centimeter of air as an eight hour time weighted average, or above 1.0 fiber per cubic centimeter averaged over thirty minutes.

- For all operations covered by the standard, regardless of exposure level: HEPA filtered vacuums to collect debris and dust, wet methods or wetting agents, and prompt cleanup and disposal of waste in leak tight containers.

- High speed abrasive disc saws without a point of cut ventilator or HEPA filtered enclosure are prohibited for work that disturbs asbestos containing or presumed asbestos containing material.

- Compressed air to remove asbestos is prohibited unless used with an enclosed ventilation system designed to capture the dust cloud, and dry sweeping, shoveling or other dry cleanup is prohibited outright.

- Employee rotation as a means of reducing exposure to asbestos is prohibited.

- All Class I work, including installation and operation of the control system, shall be supervised by a competent person.

Ask the crew

- What year is the cutoff for presumed asbestos containing material, and which two material types does it cover?

- Name the four work practices that are prohibited no matter what the air monitoring says.

- You pull a ceiling tile and find gray fibrous lagging behind it. What is the next thing you do?

Close with this

Nobody here is qualified by this talk to disturb any of it. Knowing when to put the tool down is the whole job.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: BACK SAFETY AND LIFTING

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Think about the last time your back went. Was it something huge, or was it a sheet of plywood you picked up sideways because you were nearly done?

The talk

The spine handles compression well and handles twisting under load badly. Almost every serious back injury in this trade involves a twist, a reach, or a load held away from the body, not simply weight.

Distance is the multiplier nobody feels. A load held at arm's length puts several times more force through the lower back than the same load held against your body. That is why a light awkward object hurts people more often than a heavy compact one.

So the plan is the lift. Where is it going, is the path clear, is there a door to open, is there something to set it down on halfway. Most injuries happen in the part of the lift people never planned, which is the setting down.

The mechanics: feet apart and stable, get close, bend the knees and hips not the back, grip it firmly, lift smoothly with the legs, keep it against your body, and turn with your feet instead of twisting your spine. Set it down the same way you picked it up.

Above shoulder height and below knee height are the two danger zones. Anything stored above shoulder height should come down with a ladder or a second person. Anything on the floor should be raised to waist height before you carry it if there is any way to do it.

And the two things that actually remove the risk: get help, or use equipment. A dolly, a cart, a panel carrier, a lifting strap, a second person. There is no prize for carrying a tub of thinset alone, and a team lift only works if one person calls the count.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The heaviest and most awkward thing anybody is moving today

- The path it takes, including doors, stairs, cords and the ground outside

- The carts, dollies and panel carriers on site, and whether they are being used

- Anything stored above shoulder height that has to come down

- Where material can be staged closer to where it is being used

- Who is pairing up on the awkward lifts and who is calling the count

The rules that apply

- Plan the lift before you touch it: route, destination, obstacles, and where you set it down.

- Keep the load close to your body. Distance from the spine multiplies the force far faster than weight does.

- Lift with the legs, keep the back in its natural curve, and turn with your feet rather than twisting under load.

- Get help or use equipment for anything heavy, awkward, oversized or above shoulder height.

- On a team lift, one person calls the lift, the carry and the set down.

- Stage material close to the work and off the floor so the same items are not handled five times.

Ask the crew

- What is the worst lift on this job today, and how are we doing it?

- Who has hurt their back on a job, and what were they doing when it happened?

- What could we stage closer to the work so nobody has to carry it twice?

Close with this

Plan it, keep it close, turn with your feet, and ask for help before you find out you needed it.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: NEAR MISS REPORTING

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Something nearly went wrong on this site in the last two weeks. I know it did, because something nearly goes wrong on every site. I want to hear one of them, and nobody is in trouble.

The talk

Be clear about the rules first. A near miss where nobody got hurt is not a recordable injury, so no federal rule makes anybody write it down. That is exactly why it disappears.

What is left is the General Duty Clause, which says the employer keeps the workplace free of recognized hazards. A hazard that nearly killed somebody on Tuesday is recognized. That is what a near miss actually does, it turns a hazard into a known one.

A near miss is a dropped tool that landed where nobody was standing. A trench that slumped overnight with nobody in it. A tag line that touched a line and nobody was holding it. If the only thing between that and an injury was luck or timing, it is a near miss.

The reason these go unreported is not laziness. It is that reporting one has historically meant a conversation about whose fault it was, and nobody volunteers for that. So the report has to cost nothing.

On this crew the rule is that reporting a near miss cannot be used against the person reporting it, including when the person reporting it caused it. If that ever stops being true, this stops working the same week.

What we want out of it is one sentence: what nearly happened, and what stopped it. Not a form, not an investigation, not a statement. One sentence to me, today, and then it is my job.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The spot where something nearly went wrong on this site recently.

- The tool or material stored overhead that has not fallen yet.

- The hole, edge or opening that somebody stepped around instead of fixing.

- The cord, hose or bracing that has been walked over all week.

- The task everybody has a workaround for, because the right way is awkward.

- Where you would tell me about one of these, and whether that is private enough.

The rules that apply

- A near miss is anything where only luck, timing or position stopped an injury.

- It gets reported the same day, in one sentence, to the foreman.

- Reporting one is never used against the person reporting it, including when they caused it.

- No name is required on the report for the hazard to get fixed.

- The fix gets said out loud at the next talk, so people can see reporting changed something.

- A near miss that repeats is treated as a failure of the fix, not of the person.

Ask the crew

- Name one thing this month where nobody got hurt but somebody could have.

- What stopped it, and would that same thing stop it again tomorrow?

- Is there anything you have not reported because you thought you would catch heat for it?

Close with this

Every serious injury on this site will have rehearsed itself first. Reporting it is how we get to see the rehearsal.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: COMPLACENCY

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Somebody tell me the single most cited OSHA standard in the country. Now tell me how long you think it has been number one. It is fall protection, and the answer is more than a decade.

The talk

Here is the whole federal top ten for the last fiscal year, and it is worth hearing as a list. Fall protection. Hazard communication. Ladders. Lockout tagout. Respiratory protection. Scaffolding. Fall protection training. Powered industrial trucks. Eye and face protection. Machine guarding.

Read it again and notice what is not on it. There is no new technology on that list. There is no hazard anybody needed a degree to spot. Every single one of those is a thing this crew already knows about, has been told about, and could name blindfolded.

So the interesting question is not what people do not know. It is why knowing makes no difference. And the answer is that a hazard you have survived stops registering as a hazard. The ladder you footed wrong a hundred times and walked away from a hundred times has taught you, with real evidence, that footing it wrong is fine.

That is not stupidity. That is exactly how a person is supposed to learn, and on this job it is pointed the wrong way round, because the feedback you get from a near miss is identical to the feedback you get from doing it right. You walk away either way.

Watch for the four places it bites. The task so familiar you can do it while talking. The last twenty minutes of the day. The five minute job you decided was too short to set up for. And the second time, because the first time you were careful and nothing happened, which is the lesson that does the damage.

The counter to it is not caring more. Everybody here already cares. It is putting the decision somewhere other than your own judgment in the moment: the harness clipped before you are near the edge rather than when you feel exposed, the guard on before the cut rather than for the awkward one, the ladder tied at the top every time including the two minute job.

And one more thing, for the experienced hands. The younger ones are learning from you right now, and what they can see is the shortcut, not the thirty years of judgment underneath it. They will copy the shortcut without the judgment. That is how yours becomes theirs, with none of the practice that made it survivable for you.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The task on this site that everybody here could do in their sleep. That one.

- One shortcut on this job that has worked every single time so far.

- The five minute job somebody is going to do without setting up for it today.

- Whatever we are planning for the last half hour of this shift.

- The newest person here, and which of your habits they have already copied.

- Any tool on this site with its guard swung back, taped or removed.

The rules that apply

- Fall protection, general requirements, 29 CFR 1926.501, is the most cited standard in the country and has been for years.

- Hazard communication, 29 CFR 1910.1200, is second, which means labels and safety data sheets, not anything exotic.

- Ladders in construction, 29 CFR 1926.1053, is third, and scaffolding, 29 CFR 1926.451, is sixth.

- Fall protection training, 29 CFR 1926.503, is seventh in its own right, separately from the fall protection standard itself.

- Eye and face protection in construction, 29 CFR 1926.102, is ninth, and machine guarding is tenth.

- Under Section 5(a)(1) the employer must keep the workplace free of recognized hazards likely to cause death or serious physical harm, and a hazard everybody has got used to is still a recognized one.

Ask the crew

- What is the one job here you would do without thinking? What does it need that you skip?

- Name a shortcut on this site that has worked every time so far.

- Which of the top ten would an inspector write us up for if they walked on today?

Close with this

Nothing on that list is a surprise. That is the point of reading it out.

Attendance

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TOOLBOX TALK: SPEAKING UP

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Hands up anybody who has looked at something on a site and thought that is not right, and then carried on. Keep your hand up. Now look around. That is the whole talk.

The talk

Nobody stays quiet because they do not care. They stay quiet because they are new, because they are the only one who thinks it, because the guy who owns the ladder is standing right there, or because they think it is not their business. All four of those are normal and all four of them are how people get hurt.

So here is what the law says, because most crews have never been told. It is illegal for anybody to fire you or punish you in any way because you raised a safety complaint, because you started a proceeding, because you testified, or because you used any right the Act gives you. Not discouraged. Illegal.

If it happens anyway there is a clock on it. You have thirty days from the day it happens to file a complaint with the Secretary of Labor. Thirty. Not thirty working days, and the clock does not wait for you to decide how you feel about it.

Refusing to do a job is a different thing from reporting one, and this is the part that gets people fired, because they think the two are the same. Refusing is protected in a narrow case only, and it is worth knowing the shape of it exactly.

All of this has to be true at once. A reasonable person standing where you are standing would conclude there is a real danger of death or serious injury. There is no time to fix it the normal way because of how urgent it is. You have no reasonable alternative. And where it was possible, you already asked your employer to fix it and they would not.

Read that again and notice what it does not cover. It does not cover a job you think is badly organized, or a rule you disagree with, or a hazard you never mentioned to anybody. For all of those the protected move is to say it, loudly, to the person who can fix it, and to keep saying it. The narrow refusal is for the moment you are being asked to step onto something that will kill you.

On this crew the ask is smaller than any of that. If you see it, say it, to anybody. You do not have to be right. Nobody on this site gets treated badly for being wrong about a hazard, and if that ever stops being true, you already know what the thirty days are for.

Point at these before anybody starts

- One thing on this site right now that somebody has already mentioned and nobody has fixed.

- The person on this crew you would actually tell. Not the org chart, the real one.

- Where the OSHA poster is, and whether anybody can read it from where it hangs.

- The newest person here, and who is supposed to be watching out for them.

- Anything you walked past this morning and thought about for a second.

- The phone number for the office, and whether you have it in your phone.

The rules that apply

- No person may discharge or discriminate in any manner against an employee because that employee filed a complaint, started or caused a proceeding, testified or is about to testify, or exercised any right the Act gives them.

- An employee who believes they have been discriminated against has 30 days from the violation to file a complaint with the Secretary of Labor.

- A refusal to work is protected only where a reasonable person in the circumstances would conclude there is a real danger of death or serious injury.

- It is protected only where the urgency leaves insufficient time to remove the danger through the normal enforcement channels.

- It is protected only where the employee has no reasonable alternative.

- And where possible the employee must already have asked the employer to correct the condition and been unable to get it corrected.

Ask the crew

- Who on this site would you tell, and would you do it today or wait for the end of the shift?

- How long do you have to file if you are punished for raising something?

- Name one hazard on this job that everybody knows about and nobody has said out loud.

Close with this

Being wrong about a hazard costs a minute. Being right and quiet costs somebody else.

Attendance

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