BIE SAFETY ADVISOR

Syracuse Builders Exchange, NY March 2008

Scaffold Industry

OSHA has formed a new Alliance with the Scaffold Industry Association (SIA) to provide its members and others in the construction industry with information and guidance on the safe use of scaffold and aerial lift equipment.

The Alliance will also address reducing and avoiding exposure to fall and caught in/between hazards. The two organizations will work cooperatively to develop training and education programs for the construction industry. Through the Alliance, representatives will participate in OSHA and SIA conferences, meetings and events such as SIA's 36th Annual Convention & Exposition. In addition, the Alliance will provide information through OSHA's and SIA's websites, as well as print and electronic assistance and media tools.

OSHA, NIOSH, and NHCA

An Alliance between OSHA, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and the National Hearing Conservation Association (NHCA) was recently formed to provide information on reducing and preventing exposure to noise and ototoxic (hearing damaging) chemicals.
"Millions of employees face the risk of hearing loss due to occupational exposure to high noise levels on the job," said Assistant Secretary of Labor for OSHA Edwin G. Foulke, Jr. "We are pleased to join with these organizations. Through this Alliance, we are committed to develop and provide resources to eliminate the risk of hearing loss, and help employers protect the hearing of their employees."

The Alliance will develop guidance and training materials on the recognition and prevention of hearing loss caused by workplace hazards, and communicate such information through workshops, seminars, print and electronic media. OSHA will utilize the expertise of NIOSH and NHCA representatives to develop compliance assistance tools and web pages to help employers and employees in affected industries. Alliance representatives will address hearing conservation issues at annual conferences, meetings and other events.

Orientation For New Workers Is Essential

An essential feature of any health and safety program is employee orientation. Especially for employees who may be new to the company, new to the trade, new to the project, or even new to construction. Orientation should begin as soon as an employee joins the company or is given new duties.

A copy of the health and safety policy and program should be issued and explained to each new employee. Orientation should also cover:

- explanation of project and employee duties
- WHMIS requirements
- emergency procedures
- location of first aid stations, fire extinguishers, telephones, toilets, parking
- site specific hazards
- the need to report injuries and hazards immediately to supervisor
- required personal protective equipment
- tool handling and storage
- the right to refuse unsafe work
- review of health and safety rules
- introduction to supervisor
- introduction to health and safety representative
- site tour or map where appropriate

The buddy system is a useful follow-up to orientation. Pairing a new worker with a veteran can reinforce the new employee's training and raise the buddy's safety awareness at the same time.

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MONTHLY TOOLBOX TALK
ELECTRICITY

Electricity is something we often take for granted, but our lives and jobs would certainly be a lot different without it. Stop and think for just a minute of electric powered machines and tools that assist you in your work every day. Along with all the benefits electricity provides, it can, however, be dangerous and even fatal if it is not handled properly. Every year hundreds of people are electrocuted in accidents involving less than 750 volts. Some of those fatalities, and many painful and disabling shocks, occur at 110 volts or less. When treated with respect, electricity is a great servant. When misused or treated carelessly, it can become an assassin. Let's review some of the dangers associated with electricity and how to avoid injuries.

Plan your work – make a visual inspection for any power lines in the area. Treat every line as if it were energized, bare, and dangerous. Remember that most power lines are bare metal, carrying high voltage that can cause serious injury or death. Keep in mind that many materials can conduct electricity and three of the most common conductors are metal, water and you!

Think about electric wires and junction boxes. Perhaps a wire nut is missing. Maybe an outlet is hanging out of a junction box and the contacts are exposed. Start by presuming that all wires are energized. Don't touch the wires or the contacts. If you have to work near them, get them covered or taped; or lock out the circuit by following the lockout/tagout procedure. Even if you don't have to work nearby, report the hazard to your supervisor.

Protect yourself – be sure that the temporary power supplies on your jobsite are protected by Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCI's) or an assured equipment grounding conductor program. Use only grounded drop cords that have sufficient capacity, and inspect them for damage. Never string them where they can become tripping hazards or where they are subjected to damage by vehicular traffic. Do not overload circuits at work or at home. Even if you get by with it for a while, you are doing permanent damage to the insulation and trouble will eventually result. Extension cords should also be out of the three wire type; make sure that the ground prongs are in place and that they are not frayed or damaged. Report unsafe conditions and defective equipment, turn in defective cords immediately. Do not try to repair them yourself. Never work on live circuits.

Change bad habits – never use wire to hang temporary lights; use a non-conducting material such as plastic tie straps instead.

Electrical wiring and extension cords are not for hanging clothes, tool belts, shop lights, or anything else. Take the time to remove tool or extension cords by pulling the plug, not by yanking the cord. The ground prongs on tool and extension cords are there to protect you – never break off ground prongs. If an electric tool or other piece of equipment doesn't start properly right away, stop trying to start it. Continuing to try to start the equipment could cause damage, electrocution or a fire. The slightest tingle from an electric tool should be reported and the tool removed from service. That tingle means the insulation is breaking down somewhere and it could result in a fatal shock the next time. Faulty electrical tools, equipment, cords, etc.., should be taken out of service and reported. Repairs should be made by a qualified electrician.

Watch out for extension cords; don't run over them or pile things on them. When you move electrical equipment, don't drag the cords behind the machine. Move the cords separately or pick them up and put them on the machine during the move.
The physical conditions in which you are working can increase electrical hazards. The risk of shock and electrocution go up dramatically when your hands are wet or you are working in a wet environment. Do not use or handle electrical equipment while your hands are wet or bleeding. Avoid standing in water or on a wet surface when using electrical equipment. Only specially designed, explosion proof tools should be used were flammable atmospheres exist. Lack of planning, shortcuts, and carelessness often cause accidents. When working with electricity know the hazards that exist and use sound safety practices to prevent injuries. If you sustain a shock or burn get first aid promptly. Electrical burns should be treated immediately since they are sometimes quite deep, heal slowly, and there is a high probability of infection. Because we use electricity every day, we may begin to treat it casually. A casual attitude toward electrical safety is the starting point for accidents. Make it a habit to notice and correct electrical hazards and treat electricity with care.

No job is to short or too small for lockout/tagout.