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Construction Hazards Related to Walking and Working Surfaces

Injuries resulting from slips, trips and falls are one of the primary causes of accidents in the construction industry. Overall, these types of accidents are responsible for 15% of all accidental deaths, second only to motor vehicle fatalities.

Many of the causes for walking/working surface injuries and fatalities in the construction industry stem from grease, wet spots, clutter, uneven walking surfaces, ice, electrical cords, and broken ladder steps. A simple slip and fall due to poor traction, a stumble, or loss of balance can quickly result in a debilitating injury.

Construction sites are active places where the working conditions change frequently. To reduce injuries and the resulting workers' compensation costs, both workers and supervisory staff need to be vigilant to spot and remedy potential hazards as soon as they are identified.

Here are some of the most common reasons and remedies where construction injuries occur on the job site:

Wall Openings, Sides and Edges

Construction sites are especially hazardous because they almost all have some combination of wall openings, sides and edges that are not protected, or holes or openings in the floors. These are danger zones which must be addressed to ensure the safety of on-site workers. A few simple remedial measures can correct these hazards:

- Regularly survey all work sites continuously to identify potential hazards from holes or edges and apply appropriate safety measures.
- Cover or use a guard for any identified floor holes.
- Where an unprotected edge may result in a potential fall or slip of more than 6 feet, apply an appropriate guard rail or give workers a suitable fall arrest device, such as a safety harness

Scaffolding

Quite a few construction sites employ scaffolding so that construction workers can enter the work site. However, due to poor or unsafe construction practices, many unnecessary injuries occur from these correctable hazards. To ensure safe use of scaffolding, contractors should employ the following:

- Ensure the building of scaffolding is performed by people properly trained or ticketed to build scaffolds according to the manufacturer's design. All scaffolding should be examined after completion by an appropriately trained supervisor.
- Provide adequate rails in accordance with OSHA guidelines to prevent unnecessary falls.

Uneven/Unclean Walking Surfaces

Most slips and falls on uneven or unclean surfaces can be fixed simply by immediately addressing the problems as they arise. Good housekeeping can eliminate many of the problems that result in injuries to workers.

- Ensure that all workers wear work boots with slip resistant treads.
- Clean up any spills immediately.
- Always be alert to conditions and don't walk or move without examining the surface area of the work site.
- Do not carry materials or equipment in a manner which obscures your ability to see what's in front of you.

Using Ladders

Portable ladders are frequently used on construction sites. However, many falls occur because the ground is uneven, the ladder is not safely fastened, or the ladder is at an improper angle. To avoid needless injuries, educate workers and supervisors so they can ensure that the ladder is:

- Safe and not damaged.
- Secured to a solid structure.
- Extended above the access landing by 3 feet.
- On an even and solid surface.
- Designed to bear the weight of a worker and with whatever tools he employs.

Simple safeguards and sound housekeeping can radically reduce needless injuries and resulting workers' compensation claims that result from walking and work surface injuries.