

Dealing With Hazards

In this toolbox talk, learn how to identify and avoid the most common hazards on a construction site.

Hazard Identification, Recognition & Control

Construction is more dangerous than almost any other line of work—you are constantly dealing with hazards such like heavy machinery, sharp tools, and potentially volatile chemicals on the jobsite.

These hazards add up and, if not handled properly, can cause bodily harm to you and the people around you. In this toolbox talk, we'll discuss how to recognize and control the safety hazards at your jobsite, as well as cover some common construction site hazards to look out for.

How to recognize and control construction hazards properly

On the construction site, active hazards must be addressed and if possible, eliminated immediately. No one should "work around" a potential issue.

Here are some examples of specific safety hazards and adequate controls:

- A piece of metal is sticking up out of the ground in a work area on a construction site. An employee lets his fellow workers know about the hazard, and advises them to take caution. If that is all the action that is taken, anyone walking through or working in that area is still at risk. A more effective response would be to bring a piece of heavy equipment in to remove the metal from the ground.
- A leaky pipe is causing a wet spot on a factory floor. If the only response is to put up a warning sign about slippery conditions, there is still a major hazard on the jobsite. Taking the time to fix the leak properly will more effectively remove the risk.
- A coworker is observed backing up in a [skid steer](#) without a spotter. A more experienced worker may realize that by backing up blindly, he is putting others at risk of being struck struck. Instead of making a mental note to to stay away from the work area when that coworker is operating the skid steer, the more experience employee should take the time to

have a conversation with the individual to discuss a safer and more efficient way to complete these tasks.

The point is, you shouldn't just adapt to hazards on the jobsite. You should make a concerted effort to completely eliminate hazards altogether, to keep yourself and your coworkers safer.

Common construction site hazards

Some of the most common hazards in construction include:

Heights

Each year, a significant number of worker fatalities result from heights-related falls, making working from heights the most common cause of fatal injuries to workers. If you are a supervisor, you need to be sure that all of your employees who work from heights are thoroughly trained and experienced to do the job. You also need to be sure the proper protective equipment is used and [fall protection measures](#) are observed.

Here are some of the ways you can avoid a heights-related accident:

- Avoid working from heights whenever possible. For example: If parts and components can be assembled on the ground level, complete the assembly work there instead of from any height
- Use equipment with an extra level of safety to reduce the risk of a fatal fall. For example: Use a scaffold with a double guard-rail
- Minimize the consequences of a fall with protective equipment. For example: Use a safety net

Moving objects

Another common and unavoidable risk is moving machinery. Heavy equipment and machinery will always be present on the worksite, because it is so often essential to efficient construction. However, accidents caused by moving machinery can generally be avoided, if proper precautions are taken. [Heavy equipment](#) such as supply vehicles, forklifts, and diggers can all pose a threat.

Here are some of the ways you can deal with that threat:

- Avoid working closely to any moving objects

- Be vigilant of your surroundings, especially when machinery does not have lights or beepers
- Wear personal protective equipment (PPE) such as a high visibility jacket, to ensure you are easily seen by workers operating machinery

Slips, trips, and falls

[Slip, trips, and falls](#) are a potential danger no matter where you work. For example, a wet floor at an office caused by mopping can lead to a slip. Climbing stairs can lead to falls, and objects left in hallways can lead to trips.

Slips, trips, and falls are a real hazard when working on a busy construction site. Here are some common causes of slips and trips:

- Uneven surfaces – The risk of falls from uneven surfaces can be reduced by clearly designating walkways and good lighting.
- Obstacles – Instances of slipping and tripping over obstacles can be dramatically reduced by making sure everyone keeps their work and storage areas tidy. You can also designate specific areas for waste collection.
- Trailing cables – Cordless tools should be used whenever possible. If you need to use tools with cords, cables should be run at high levels.
- Wet or slippery surfaces – If a surface is slippery with mud it should be treated with stone, and if it is slippery with ice it should be treated with grit. Any areas that are slippery should be signposted, and workers should wear slip-resistant footwear with a good grip.

Noise

Unfortunately, many construction workers are unaware of the long-term damage noise can cause until it's too late. Hearing PPE is required on the worksite to prevent [noise induced hearing loss](#).

When you are working with heavy machinery and heavy materials, loud noises are a common occurrence. Without proper protective gear, these loud noises can take a toll over time, leading to hearing loss or tinnitus. Make sure your ears are always protected when you're on the job.

Hazard recognition starts with you

Working in construction is dangerous. You don't need a toolbox talk to tell you that.

However, many of these workplace injuries can be avoided with proper safety protocols. Knowledge is key to recognizing the dangers of construction work and taking steps to mitigate the risks.