Elimination of Hazards

Understand common hazards on the jobsite and how to eliminate them.

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It’s important to make sure you and your coworkers are fully aware of potential hazards on the jobsite.

This talk isn't centered around mitigating risk, but rather how you can avoid risk altogether by eliminating hazards and following best safety practices.

Examples of common hazards

As a construction professional, you will contend with a variety of physical hazards at work each day. Common construction hazards include:

- Working from heights
- Falling objects
- Moving objects and vehicles
- Structural collapse
- Harmful materials

Know the risks

Your foreman or supervisor will educate you on proper rules and procedures to avoid accidents and injuries. However, it is your responsibility to follow them.

While personal protective equipment (PPE) is necessary, you shouldn't just put on a pair of gloves or eyewear and rely on PPE to keep you safe. It is better to identify all the hazards of a task before you start working. If you understand the risks, you can take steps to work more safely or, better yet, eliminate hazards entirely.

Eliminate the risks

Construction work is inherently dangerous. Fully eliminating hazards can be difficult or even impossible. However, there are some proactive steps you can take.

Examples of eliminating hazards

Here are some examples of ways to eliminate hazards on the worksite:

- John Smith sees a hammer hanging halfway off of a piece of heavy equipment that is being used and alerts the operator. Instead of just trying not to knock the hammer off the elevated surface, the operator decides to remove it and put it back on the tool bench. This ensures neither he nor anyone else will be struck by the hammer falling off the elevated surface.
- Two workers have cut their fingers while sharpening woodworking tools onsite. The safety manager decides to make a new policy that sharpening will now be completed by a third party company and not by the field crew. The sharpening equipment is removed from the jobsite, and the workers are trained on the new policy.
- ACME Construction Company is excavating and moving a large amount of dirt for a project. Due to excessive rain, the site conditions make it very dangerous for dump trucks to operate. The superintendent decides to shut down dump trucks for the day and have only the dozer operators come in to dress up the site.

Start at the beginning

When you are hired for a new construction job or start working on a new jobsite, the best way to know about the risks involved is to ask your foreman. Read over company policies and know what responsibility you have for protecting yourself against risks as well as what responsibility your employer has. If you have any questions, make sure you ask before you start working.

It’s important to remember that policies are put in place to not only protect you but also protect your coworkers and anyone else working on the jobsite. If you do not follow policies, you could be putting everyone at risk.

Shortcuts are hazards

Sometimes you’re tired after a long day’s work. You’re ready to clock out, so you’re willing to make a few shortcuts here and there so you can head home for the day. Or, maybe a deadline is approaching, and you know you need to finish a certain task as soon as possible, so you cut a few corners to get the job done.

Unfortunately, taking shortcuts is an unsafe act and can be incredibly dangerous. Anytime you're cutting corners when working with tools and heavy machinery, you place yourself and everyone onsite at risk. Heavy machinery and potentially hazardous materials require your full attention. Cutting corners almost always leads to a complete disregard for safety.

Conclusion

While there are steps you can take to minimize risk, such as wearing the proper PPE, these methods should be viewed as a last resort. Hazard elimination is the best way to keep you, your coworkers, and other workers on the construction site safe.

Eliminating hazards on the jobsite starts at the beginning of each task. Make sure that you are 100% aware of the risks you and others could face and have considered how these risks can be avoided.

If everyone onsite understands the hazards of the work being completed and does their part to eliminate them, risks can be minimized.