

Toolbox Talks 2

054: Unsafe Acts: Elevations

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Review company safety policies related to ladders, scaffolding, scissor lifts, and other equipment for elevated work.

What this Safety Talk covers:

Most injuries occur not due to unsafe conditions, but due to unsafe acts. This Safety Talk addresses unsafe acts related to working on elevations. An “elevation” is any work area that is above the normal level, floor, or grade.

Discussion notes:

Unsafe acts related to working on elevations

- Carrying things up a ladder to the elevated location. You can carry things up stairs, not up ladders. Use a bucket and rope or other means to transport things to the elevation. If you’re using a scissor lift, secure materials before going up.
- Assuming an elevated platform is secure. Inspect it before use. Many people have fallen through poorly secured floor planks.
- Using a portable ladder on the elevated surface. Scaffolding and scissor lifts aren’t good surfaces on which to use a portable ladder.
- Working on a platform located over energized equipment or potentially dangerous processes without providing a safety net or other suitable barrier. A fall is bad enough. Falling into 480V switchgear or an acid vat is far worse.
- Working on a platform located over combustibles, without providing for emergency egress from the platform or neutralizing the fire hazard first. What will you do if the material under you ignites?
- Securing lanyards to process pipes, raceways, or other objects that contain energy sources. These structures are not designed to support the force of a fall, and an energy release is likely.
- Leaning out past the floor of the elevation. This can put your center of gravity “over the edge” and cause you to fall.
- Standing on the guard rails of the elevation. The guard rails are there to keep you within a certain space, not to serve as step ladders.
- Adding on to an elevated platform, using unauthorized materials or methods. An example is placing a plank between the floor of a scissor lift and the floor of a mezzanine, rather than erecting scaffolding. The scissor lift is typically not designed to support the lateral force this would generate.
- Using an elevated platform as a work surface for bending raceway. If you’re tempted to save time on those EMT bends by using a manual bender against the scaffolding structure, don’t. You would generate forces the scaffolding wasn’t intended to support. Make the bends on the ground.
- Allowing materials to accumulate. A slipping hazard on an elevation creates a falling hazard for you. Loose materials create a “falling on” hazard for people below the elevation. Practice good housekeeping at all times.

Review and discussion

1. What’s a safety practice that reduces your chances of falling off a ladder when moving to an elevation?
2. What are some ways to move parts, tools, and materials onto an elevation?
3. Is scaffolding always safe? What should you do before stepping onto it? What is a danger of elevated platforms constructed with planks?

4. A scissor lift won't quite reach a beam on which you need to mount a lighting fixture. Why can't you use a ladder or stand on the rails of the lift? What should you do in such a situation? *[Note to Presenter: The basic problem here is you don't have the right tool for the job. Everyone knows not to use the edge of a flatblade screwdriver to turn a Phillips head screw—that's just going to strip the screwhead and make the job take even longer. The scissor lift situation is similar, and so is the solution: get the right tool for the job.]*

5. If you need to work on a platform that's above a hot process—for example, an aluminum melting pot—what kinds of precautions should you look at taking?

6. What is the main danger when working above a high concentration of combustibles, and what should you do about it?

7. If you can't quite reach something because the scaffolding isn't quite close enough, is there a problem in leaning over the railing to reach it? What if a partner holds your feet?

8. What's wrong with securing a lanyard to a 4-inch steam pipe? After all, it's a big pipe and those are big hangers. It can support your weight, right?

9. If you need to extend a platform, why should you not use unauthorized materials or methods? What should you do? *[Note to Presenter: There may not be a proper way to extend a given platform. Look at all of the options for getting to the needed location. These may include using a second platform, modifying the permanent structure (for example, welding a platform in permanently), or contacting the elevation equipment (scaffolding, lift) manufacturer or rental firm for technical assistance.]*

10. What are some general ideas on housekeeping when working on an elevation, and what kind of dangers does housekeeping prevent? *[Note to Presenter: "Housekeeping" is a matter of keeping the work area neat. This means doing such things as putting tools back in pouches and parts back in buckets rather than laying them on the scaffolding floor.]*

Participant's Signature and Date

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.