

Toolbox Talks 2

064: Unsafe Acts: Stairways

Discussion leader duties for this session:

If your company has any safety material that addresses stairways, review it.

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 stairways.

Discussion notes:

Stairway safety facts

- We are used to stairways, and this is part of the problem with stairway safety.
- On level ground, a falling hazard means you fall once. On stairways, a falling hazard presents the danger of falling many times over.
- Falls on stairs involve a high degree of risk to the neck and spinal column.
- You can fall going up a stairway, not just down it.

Unsafe acts on stairways

- Using a stairway when it is being used to transport materials. How dangerous this is depends on the amount of materials, what they are, and how much of the stairway their transport is using up. Generally, you should move to a landing and wait for those who are carrying materials to pass. If someone is just carrying a bucket of parts, then obviously you can both pass on the stairs.
- Using a stairway when another crew is transporting compressed gas on it. Similar to the previous bullet point, except for the degree of caution. In this case, it's absolute. Stay off a stairway any time it's being used to transport compressed gas. On a well-managed site, breaking this rule is a firing offense.
- Leaving anything on a stairstep. Sometimes, this can't be avoided. You may, for example, need to route portable cords along a stairway. In such a case, think about how to minimize the tripping hazard. For example, routing the cords to one side and taping them so they don't move will nearly eliminate the tripping hazard.
- Running cords across a stair step. Look for an alternate route, rather than leaving a tripping hazard that a person must *step across*. For example, you could tape it to the vertical board or plate between the steps if one exists.
- Running on steps. Running moves your center of gravity ahead of you rather than keeping it under you. If you miss a step, your momentum can make it impossible for you catch yourself.
- Carrying too big of an object. If both hands are occupied carrying something, you can't use the railing to catch yourself. Further, your vision is obstructed and you are therefore more likely to miss a step.
- Carrying too heavy of an object. Losing your balance and straining your back are two dangers to you. But what if you drop that object while others are below you?
- Using unguarded electrical devices. Don't risk electrifying the stairway. Many people assume the stairway is safely "grounded" and thus can't be electrified by a broken lamp or loose cord plug. That assumption is wrong.

Review and discussion

1. Why are people so often complacent about stairway safety?
2. Why is a fall on stairs more dangerous than a fall on level ground?

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