

Toolbox Talks 2

094: Unsafe Conditions: Overhead Lifting

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Walk to any place on this job where overhead lifting is part of the work. For example, look at a light fixture or a run of conduit. What conditions could make it less safe to lift things into place overhead? Make a short list. Be prepared to use them as examples.

What this Safety Talk covers:

This Safety Talk addresses conditions that can make overhead lifting unsafe.

Discussion notes:

Primary rule of lifting

Pay attention *before* you lift, so you aren't struggling *while* you lift.

Overhead lifting facts to think about

- To lift something overhead, you use an entire chain of body structures. These include muscles, ligaments, tendons, and the disks in your neck and back. All of these are at risk when you lift anything overhead.
- Lifting isn't just a matter of strength. It also requires balance and coordination. Some conditions can raise the requirements of these last two factors beyond what a person can deliver.
- If you're lifting something overhead, your head is in the drop zone. So is the rest of your body, including your feet.

Conditions that can make overhead lifting unsafe

- You're not positioned properly. You want to keep the lift as "neutral" as possible. Get directly under the load. Avoid setting up for the lift in a way that requires you to twist, reach, or lean.
- The surface is unstable. You need to focus on properly balancing the load. You don't want to also be shifting your feet to keep from falling.
- You're lifting while on a ladder. This is unavoidable. Position yourself properly and ensure the ladder is stable, before making the lift. This is especially important if the load is bulky. But don't be fooled by items that are small or light, either.
- You're not warmed up. At the start of the day or after a break, your muscles and ligaments may not be ready for lifting. Warm up with dry-run "lifting" movements.
- Another person's talking to you. Don't carry on a conversation and lift things overhead at the same time. The conversation distracts you from paying attention. And talking means you aren't breathing properly during the lift, thus putting your spine at risk. Full lungs stabilize the spine. Don't lift and talk at the same time.
- You're exhausted. So it's been a long day. Your forearms are sore and bloated. Your legs wobble a bit as you climb the ladder. Do you really think you'll be able to safely handle lifting things over your head with no danger of dropping them? Especially if they shift unexpectedly? Switch to another task for a while or maybe the rest of the day.
- Lighting is poor. One key to safe lifting, and to preventing exhaustion, is to get it over with. Have sufficient lighting so that you don't have to struggle with a fixture or transformer to get it into place while holding it overhead.

Review and discussion

1. What's the primary rule of lifting?

