

Toolbox Talks 2

097: Unsafe Conditions: Stairways

Discussion leader duties for this session:

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

What this Safety Talk covers:

This Safety Talk addresses unsafe conditions on stairways.

Discussion notes:

Unsafe conditions when you're working on stairways

- Clutter on stairway. This seems obvious. But many people confuse “clutter” with “garbage.” Generally, nothing should be on a stairway that doesn't absolutely have to be there. This includes tools, ladders, equipment, cords, and even crew members. Avoid creating tripping hazards or unduly narrowing the available stairway.
- Stairway needs to be fully occupied. If you need to fully occupy a stairway, for example, when installing emergency exit lighting, you don't want traffic coming through. Erect a suitable barrier. If the stairway is a fire exit, remove the barrier and all clutter before leaving.
- Scaffolding erected on stairs. Stairs are very narrow. Don't use any scaffolding erected on stairs until you've inspected the footing to ensure it's adequate and fully supported by whatever stairstep it's placed on. Generally, this situation means the stairs are fully occupied.
- Unguarded electrical devices in use. Don't risk electrifying the stairway. Many people assume a metal stairway is safely “grounded” and thus can't be electrified by a broken lamp or loose cord plug. That assumption is wrong.

Unsafe conditions when you're walking on stairways

- Materials being transported on stairway. The degree of danger 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 carrying just a bucket of parts, then obviously you can both pass on the stairs.
- Compressed gas being transported on stairway. 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.
- Portable cords routed carelessly. This is a common problem. If cords are routed in a way that creates a tripping hazard, ask the crew that owns those cords to fix the problem. If they don't agree to do so, report this to your foreman.
- Crowded steps. If you notice a stairway is crowded with materials and crew members, consider using a different stairway.
- Containers of solvent, cleaners, or paint on steps. Be alert to the spill hazard.

Review and discussion

1. What is clutter? Does it mean more than just garbage?
2. If you need to fully occupy a stairway, what should you do?
3. What's a danger you need to look out for on scaffolding that's erected on stairways?
4. Is a metallic stairway an electrocution-free zone? Why or why not?

5. What kinds of devices can cause electrocution on metallic stairways?
6. If other people are transporting materials on a stairway you're also using, what should you do?
7. What's the rule about compressed gas transportation on stairways?
8. How should portable cords be routed?
9. If you're about to start up a stairway that's crowded with materials and people, what should you do if there's another stairway available? What if it takes you out of your way?
10. What danger should you be aware of if containers of solvent, cleaners, or paint are on the steps you're using?

Participant's Signature and Date

[illegible]