
WEEKLY TOOLBOX TALK: SEVERE WEATHER

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SEVERE WEATHER

WHY TALK ABOUT THE WEATHER?

Actually, we have no control over rain, snow, sleet, wind, lightning or sunshine. But we can control what happens on our job as a result of the elements. Some of the biggest problems on construction jobs are caused by wind and lightning. Wind probably causes the most accidents; lightning can be deadly.

WATCH OUT FOR WIND

Don't let the wind catch you off guard. I'm not just thinking of tornadoes or hurricanes, but of everyday winds and unexpected gusts. Wind just loves to pick up anything it can and sail it away. So when it's windy, securely tie or weigh down supplies and materials. It's amazing what a little wind can do. Some gusts can pick up a 4 x 8 sheet of plywood from the top of a high-rise building and carry it several blocks. Or blow you off a scaffold.

On one occasion, the wind blew sheetrock and studs off a 23-story building. Pieces of debris were on the street and on top of cars. What would have happened if the sheetrock had landed on you? You'd have had more than a giant sized headache.

It seems the higher you go, the stronger the wind. When working on tall buildings, stay away from roof edges, floor openings, and similar drop-offs where the wind could blow you over. Weigh down or otherwise secure material or equipment that can be blown down.

Don't loiter on the leeward side of unbraced walls, lumber stacks or anything else that can be blown over by a sudden gust of wind. In many instances, workers have been seriously injured when an unbraced wall or form was blown over on them while they were sitting in its shade during lunch or before starting work.

LIGHTNING HURTS

Every so often we read about workers being struck by lightning. They usually come out second best.

Recently a hook-up man was electrocuted when lightning struck the crane boom while he was holding on to the hook preparing some materials to be lifted.

We all like to keep things moving until we're rained out. But when lightning is around, it's safer to take shelter early. Very often an electrical storm occurs without rain. Or a lightning storm proceeds the rain. So if you're working on a scaffold outside of the building, on top of steel framework, or around other projecting equipment or a building the safest thing to do is to seek shelter when you see lightning.

You will be reasonably safe from lightning inside the structure, particularly when it's equipped with lightning rods. You'll also be fairly safe in an automobile or truck. But never take shelter under an isolated tree or where you're in contact with a tractor, crane, or other equipment. If you get caught out in the open, stay as low as you can. It's much safer to be down in a ditch than on top of the ground.

RAIN CAN RUIN A JOB

Rain may be good for the farmer but it can play havoc with a construction job. It can turn it into a gigantic mud pie. Water seems to get in everywhere. Rain can ruin building materials and supplies and generally make things down right messy. Steel gets slippery, equipment gets stuck, and we get wet.

By covering equipment, materials, tools, supplies and ourselves, we don't give rain a chance to do as much damage as it could. We can eliminate slipping hazards by sweeping water out of low areas used as passageways inside of buildings under construction.

CONTROLLING THE WEATHER

As I said, we can control the weather only as far as it affects the job. I haven't been able to discuss all of the safety precautions that can be taken in case of inclement weather. But common sense usually dictates the right thing to do in any situation.

Remember!! Always be aware of safety on the job site. It could save your life, so keep site safety at the front of your mind