

Daily Toolbox Talk: Risk Identification
Tuesday May 2, 2023

It comes as no surprise that construction is considered a high-risk industry. We don't need to regurgitate OSHA statistics to understand this; we can look around us at any time and see heavy crane loads, fall hazards, excavations, electrical risks, and more.

However, even in this high-risk industry our talented crews and teams manage to work millions, even billions, of hours every year without injury. How is it that we accomplish such an impressive feat? We know it takes more than luck. Working safely day after day requires a good understanding of the task at hand, the ability to identify areas of risk, and the willingness to speak up and address those risks.

Risk identification is not as easy as it might seem. Some hazards, such as unguarded fall exposures, are obvious, while others, like live electrical and unstable soil conditions, might be less apparent. Take the following three steps to ensure you and your crew stay safe despite the possible presence of these hazards.

- 1) Acknowledge *Error-Likely Situations* to anticipate where you and other crew members are more likely to make mistakes, especially under stressful conditions. Examples include:
 - a. Activities with new or inexperienced crew members
 - b. New task and/or tools
 - c. Change in work sequence
 - d. Highly repetitive tasks
 - e. Other external factors such as schedule pressure, weather, or personal distractions
 - f. Downtime where well-intended craft professionals work beyond the scope of the plan to stay busy and end up encountering unforeseen hazards, such as a yet-to-be-located live utility, etc.

We must use our voices to help us make safe choices, so openly discuss which of these might apply to the work you are doing each day and implement protective measures to minimize the chances of an error and ensure no one is injured as the result.

- 2) Utilize a tool, such as the Energy Wheel, or other structured evaluation process when conducting your hazard assessments. Again, while some hazards (such as fall exposures) are more obvious, others take deeper thought for us to recognize them. Use of structured tools/processes can help us consistently identify hazards such as pressurized systems, live electrical hazards, or chemical exposures that might otherwise go unrecognized.
- 3) Identify the critical steps of the task. Some companies use the acronym STCKY for "Stuff That Can Kill You" to identify the tasks that must be done right or someone will be seriously injured or killed. Spend time discussing what must go right for the activity to be successful. Take extra time to discuss activities where the safety of an individual is solely dependent on them making the "right" choice, for example, proper adjustment of a rope grab system on a sloped roof to prevent an individual from reaching the edge. Where these critical steps exist, work as a crew or with supervision to build in resilience or add layers of protection to ensure that if someone makes a mistake, it doesn't result in a severe incident. What could we explore to make work safer? Are there other ideas to make work safer? Are you actively sharing them with your



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crews? It doesn't matter what level of experience you have; everyone can speak up. That's what having a strong voice is all about. We all intend to get things right every time, but the reality is that people make mistakes. Taking time to identify STCKY steps in our work, where there is no room for error, and making sure we have redundancy in those defenses, may save your life or someone else's.

Construction may be a high-risk industry, but no one should accept that getting hurt is part of the job. Acknowledge situations where you know you are likely to experience an error and discuss them openly with your crew. Use a tool or structured thought process to help you identify hazards and protect yourself from those that may be less obvious, but not less lethal, in your work. Lastly, identify the critical steps that must go right in your work to protect yourselves and others, and invest time in making sure your defenses will keep you safe.

Discuss watchouts, create stop points, and create redundancy in your protective measures. Together, strong voices help all of us make safe choices. No one comes to work wanting to get injured. By identifying risks and investing time to ensure our protective measures are adequate, we can help ensure we are all able to return home to our friends and loved ones at the end of the day, and we are using our voices to make safe choices.

