

TOOLBOX TALK #45

ROOFTOP HAZARDS – PART 1

In certain regions that experience cold winters, working on rooftops can be a treacherous endeavor. Ice can make travel dangerous. Snow loads can threaten structural integrity. Shoveling can potentially increase the risk of sprains, strains and heart attacks. And still, weather-related hazards are only some of the dangers of working on a roof. These articles present several hazards that employees should be aware of when working on a rooftop.

Skylights

Workers falling through skylights, unfortunately, a fairly common occurrence. A quick search on OSHA's website shows that 22 such incidents occurred in 2017, nine of which resulted in a fatality. A serious problem with skylights is that the glass domes or other coverings can give workers a false sense of security. Covered or not, skylights are holes and must be treated as such. When working around them, roofs or worksites must have rails, nets or other systems designed for the purpose of protecting human life, and workers must wear proper fall protection equipment.



Also, various types of skylights exist. While some may be designed to withstand hundreds of pounds of force, most skylights are not. In some cases, skylights may not be visible, such as when fiberglass roof panels are used. Looking from within the building, it may be apparent that certain panels are made of a weaker, translucent material to allow light to enter the building. However, when on the roof looking down into a dark building, the skylight panels may not be discernable from the surrounding panels, putting workers at considerable risk. These panels can also prove extremely dangerous for firefighters.

Structural integrity

While roof membrane may be patched, re-patched and periodically replaced, the structural components beneath may be all but ignored. Conduct a walkthrough prior to the start of work to test out the surface and get a look from underneath, if possible. Unless the roof is confirmed to be in good condition, do not place weight in any one spot without testing it first.

Exhaust

It is critical to understand the type of facility where employees are working. Is it new construction or existing? If existing, does it produce any kind of exhaust? Can this be dangerous to workers on the roof? Manufacturing facilities, laboratories and other types of buildings can vent toxic materials into the work area. Most of these facilities have roof access policies for this reason. When working on such facilities, it is critical that workers do everything necessary to comply with roof access policies.