

TOOLBOX TALK #47

ROOFTOP HAZARDS – PART 3

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.

Fall protection

Rooftop fall protection is a frequently misunderstood section of the OSHA regulations. Many contractors do not understand that a safety monitor with a warning line 6 feet from the edge is a solution specifically allowed for roofers. Mechanical contractors, electrical contractors and maintenance crews are not roofers. For those that are roofers, remember that warning line systems, while necessary in some situations, will not physically prevent a fall. There is quite a bit of existing fall protection technology (from counterweighted, non-penetrating anchor points to roofing fall protection carts) that would physically protect workers and prevent falls.



Non-roofers must find a different way to protect workers. Traditional fall protection is ideal, but due to some difficult scenarios, a few allowances can help ease the burden on employers. In a construction setting, OSHA will consider a warning line set back 15 feet from the edge to be a non-conforming guardrail and will cite it as a *de minimis* violation, meaning that no monetary penalty would be attached. No additional fall protection would be required as long as workers do not cross the warning line into the danger zone (within 15 feet). If they need to do so, then conventional fall protection must be utilized.

Distractions

This is the age of distraction. People often cannot drive, sit through a movie, or eat dinner without checking their phones. This can be dangerous in the workplace, especially in inherently dangerous work locations such as roofs. On a roof, something as simple as taking a step backward without looking could be deadly, let alone traversing the work area while distracted. Ensure policies are in place that prohibit cell phone use and train supervisors to look out for other distractions.

Conclusion

Many workers think a relatively flat surface equals a safe surface, however, this may not be the case. Do not be fooled into thinking that a general requirement to use fall protection will prevent falls on roofs. It is the company's duty to ensure that the workforce understands exactly what is needed in these situations, through specific policies and proper training.