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Volume 32

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Hard Hats—Again

A hard hat is perhaps the most familiar and recognizable piece of personal protective equipment in construction. The image of the hard hat is so closely tied to construction work, that construction workers are sometimes referred to as "hard hats" themselves. Maybe the hard hat has become a steadfast symbol of construction because the hats are bright and colorful. Maybe it's because they've been saving lives for over 90 years.

Hard hats come in many different styles and colors, but in order to be OSHA approved, they must meet certain requirements of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI Z89.1). The ANSI requirements grade hard hats by type and class in order to help workers find the hard hat that will protect them from the hazards they encounter in their workplaces.

No matter how familiar hard hats are, and how easy they are to put on, many of you are still forgetting (or refusing) to wear them. According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), between October 2007 and September 2008, the head protection standard was cited 1,725 times for violations. Proposed fines totaled almost one million dollars.

A hard hat is one of the most important safety devices you wear. These plastic devices are generally your only defense in case an object falls from above and strikes your head. They are designed to reduce the impact to your head and

your brain. A single head injury can be fatal or can cause severe and permanent brain damage.

It's really troubling that in spite of all the information available on how hard hats save lives, there are still many construction workers who violate OSHA standards, and defy common sense, by refusing to wear them. This is not a smart or safe decision. The simple act of putting on your hard hat can be a lifesaving move on your part.

OSHA requires—that's a requirement, not a recommendation—that you wear a hard hat where there is a potential for objects falling from above, a possibility that you may strike your head against a fixed or protruding object, or where accidental head contact may be made with electrical hazards. You should inspect your hard hat routinely for dents, cracks, or deterioration. Hard hats must be replaced after a heavy blow or electrical contact.

Every day that you're on the job, you should wear a hard hat. If you choose not to wear one, the only people you're putting at risk are yourself and your wife and kids. Don't be hardheaded. Wear your hard hat.

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SAFETY REMINDER
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According to OSHA, hard hats must meet ANSI Z89.1-1969 requirements. If you're unsure whether your hard hat meets these requirements, check the certification label or talk to your supervisor.

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Everybody's a Safety Inspector

You may have seen an OSHA compliance officer conduct an inspection of your jobsite. OSHA's inspectors are highly trained professionals who can recognize and evaluate hazards in the workplace. They can enter and inspect a jobsite as part of their general duties, or in response to a specific complaint. Their objective is to reduce hazardous conditions on the job to make your workplace safe.

In that regard, you have a lot in common with these compliance officers. You both want to reduce the hazardous conditions on the job, and you're both familiar with how to identify hazards. However, inspectors may come around to your particular jobsite only occasionally, whereas you are on the jobsite every day. Because you have the most to gain from your workplace being safe, you should think and act like a safety inspector.

We spend more of our waking hours at work than we do at home. Most construction workers are on the job before the sun comes up and leave after dark. We spend all those hours working, moving materials around the project, walking from one area to another, eating lunch, and taking breaks. What would it be like if we stayed alert and looked for the safety hazards and violations around us? If every construction worker on the jobsite did this, think about all the eyes and ears looking out for hazards. It would be like having a safety inspector on the site all day, every day, keeping an eye out for hazardous conditions

and safety violations (minus the fines that come with the official inspection).

You are a highly trained construction professional. You've been trained to recognize what's safe and unsafe. You have experience and knowledge. Quite frankly, no one knows your job better than you do. Put that knowledge to work for your safety and your co-workers' safety. As a construction worker, you have a responsibility to correct unsafe conditions. Fix what you can, and tell your supervisor about the things you can't fix yourself. Your contribution could be something as small as removing an object from a walkway to reduce the likelihood of someone tripping, or reminding a co-worker to wear a hard hat.

As you go about your day at work, think of yourself as a safety inspector. Look for unsafe conditions or acts. Stop and chat with co-workers to help them correct the unsafe condition or action. Give them a pat on the back if they're wearing their personal protective equipment (PPE) and working safely. You can make a difference and you might even save a life.

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SAFETY REMINDER
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You can also do your part by setting a good example. Don't take shortcuts or ignore safe practices because you never know who might be looking up to you.

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Working Safely with Corrosives and Solvents

As a construction worker, you are always working around hazardous substances. Today we will focus on two specific types—corrosives and solvents—and discuss what you can do to protect yourself from exposure to these dangerous chemicals.

A **corrosive** is a substance that causes visible destruction or irreversible alterations to living tissue at the site of contact. In other words, corrosives eat through skin tissue as well as through other materials. Some common corrosives include drain cleaners, Portland cement, and common acids.

Hazards include burns that can damage your eyes, skin, respiratory system, and gastrointestinal tract if you touch, inhale, or swallow the chemical. Essentially, any exposure to a corrosive can lead to a chemical burn. When handling Portland cement or acids, it's important that you wear the proper eye protection such as chemical goggles, and hand and finger protection. Protective clothing or aprons can also help prevent chemical burns to the body.

A **solvent** is a substance, usually a liquid, in which other substances dissolve. Solvents can be found in many products around a jobsite such as paint, paint thinners, caulks, cleaners, degreasers, fuels, and adhesives. Note that you may be exposed even if you never come in contact with a liquid. Many solvents evaporate or outgas during drying and curing processes (like when paint dries); you can be exposed by inhaling the solvent present in the air. Some health effects of exposure to solvents include nausea, vomiting, loss of

consciousness, damage to skin tissue, and even permanent blindness. Some solvents can cause damage to internal organs and cause long-term health effects like cancer.

When working with corrosives, solvents, or any hazardous chemical, review the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS). Pay particular attention to information on routes of entry and ways to protect yourself from injury. Once you have read it, it's important that you wear all the PPE required to protect yourself from injury.

Keep in mind that chemicals can enter your body in four different ways: 1) Inhalation through the lungs if it's in the air around you; 2) Absorption through the skin or eyes if you come in contact with the chemical; 3) Ingestion by mouth, especially if it's accidentally mixed with food or drink; and 4) Injection if you work around a high-pressure line containing the chemical.

You can protect yourself by knowing the hazards of corrosives and solvents. Always know what chemicals you're working with. Use PPE and make sure you work in an area with lots of fresh air. Know what to do in case of accidental contact with the chemical. You can get additional information from the label, the MSDS, or from your supervisor.

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SAFETY REMINDER
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Don't let hazardous chemicals become environmental contaminants. Dispose of hazardous materials in the appropriate manner.

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Rigging

A rigger is a construction worker who specializes in the lifting and moving of extremely large and heavy objects. Riggers play a major role in the safe operation of cranes. They work together with the crane operator and the signal person to complete lifts safely. A rigger is responsible for making sure every load is rigged properly. One wrong move could lead to a disastrous, possibly deadly, lift.

There are many factors that a rigger must take into consideration before any lift. **A rigger must:**

- Know the weight of the load.
- Locate the center of gravity of the load.
- Double-check weights with shipping scale weights.
- Consider both the weight and the configuration of the load while planning a lift.
- Inspect the load and rigging gear prior to use.
- Determine whether attachment points are provided on the load.
- Ensure that attachment points on the load are intended to handle the entire weight and not just a component.
- Account for the weight of all rigging components when determining the final weight of the load. This includes the jib boom, wire rope, hooks, shackles, and spreader beams.
- Select a hitch that will hold and control the load.
- Select the sling best suited for the load.
- Protect the sling from sharp edges or corners.

- Know the limitations of hoisting devices.
- Make appropriate crane capacity deductions based on the crane manufacturer's load chart.
- Watch for overhead power lines. Keep loads at least 10 feet away from any power lines.
- Think about the load's path of travel. A properly rigged load will need the least amount of maneuvering by the crane operator.
- Determine whether wind, temperature, humidity, or rain will call for special handling requirements.

Whether you're a rigger or not, anytime a crane is carrying a load overhead, make sure everyone is kept clear of the lift area. All lifts should start and stop slowly and smoothly. Always use the proper hand signals. Never leave a load unattended. Make sure safety requirements are met at all times. Don't forget: the law of gravity judges rigging and crane mistakes immediately and without leniency.

Proper, safe rigging takes skill, care, and knowledge—it's a lot more than just tying up loose ends. A well-trained rigger can take pride in knowing that he is making lifting operations much safer.

SAFETY REMINDER

Whether you're rigging a load or tying stuff down in the bed of your pickup truck, always use appropriate equipment. Never use extension cords, wire ties, or clothesline to secure, lift, or rig a load.

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