

7 Common Workplace Safety Hazards

*Written by Willie Henning,
DMI EH&S Consultant*

Eight years ago, Safety & Health asked National Safety Council workplace consultants about hazards they commonly spot during jobsite safety audits – and what safety professional and workers can do about them. The resulting article is still popular and continues to generate comments.

1. Working at Height

Hazards associated with working at height can easily stack up, the experts say. Perhaps an employer doesn't have a written fall protection plan or is unaware of OSHA's requirement to provide fall protection. Or maybe the fall protection equipment onsite is damaged, worn improperly or not attached to anything. In fiscal year 2024, OSHA's Top 10 most frequently cited standards included four related to working at height. Why do these issues persist? Fall prevention starts with proper training and auditing. Employers must know where and when fall protection is required. They should regularly provide training and refresher training to workers, and routinely evaluate the organization's fall protection program. Make sure workers have the correct-sized gear and that they know how to properly hook to an anchor point when working at height.

2. Poor Housekeeping

A sight seen too often, an exit route blocked by containers, machinery or garbage. If an exit sign is even properly posted and visible that is. Other examples of poor housekeeping include unclean material or chemical spills and clutter, either of which can result in slips, trips, and falls. Encouraging workers to clean as they go can help limit these issues. So can remaining attentive even when the coast is seemingly clear.

3. Forklifts

Often in the workplace, pedestrians do not respect forklifts and sometimes operators do not fully understand the power and weight of the lift.

Common hazards include:

- A missing or unreadable nameplate or data plate that lists the forklift's capabilities and limitations.
- Unauthorized forklift modifications (drilling holes in the forks for a trailer hitch or attachment point, for example).
- Damage to dock doors or overhead door panels because the forklift mast wasn't lowered.

Forklift operators must be trained and must always wear a seatbelt as well as say "no" to speeding and horseplay. It's also important to inspect forklifts before use to ensure they are in

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good *working* order. Closely check the seat belts, tires, lights, horn, brakes, backup alarms, fluid levels and moving and load supporting forklift parts.

4. Hand Hazards

Cuts. Scrapes. Broken fingers. Amputations. All of these can result when workers use machinery – and are becoming increasingly common at manufacturing worksites. Although wearing gloves is recommended and can guard against chemical, vibration and laceration hazards, PPE is the lowest rung on the Hierarchy of Controls. Changing behavior can help limit hand injuries at a higher level. Ensure workers understand the hazards associated with the type of equipment they are operating.

5. Electricity

Safety & Health looked at five common electrical safety errors: treating electrical work casually, not accounting for all scenarios, improper use of PPE, and underestimating arc flash boundaries and relying on institutional knowledge. Noted hazards on a worksite include:

- Electrical cables with damaged insulation or exposed bare wires.
- Damaged electrical outlets or outlets with covers missing.
- Blocked electrical panels without at least a 3-foot clearance
- Panel plastic fittings damaged or missing
- Connecting multiple extension cords, also known as “daisy chaining”

Employers should ensure regular training on electrical safety is provided and incorporated in overall safety training that includes risk assessment and auditing procedures. In addition, make sure workers exposed to electrical ark or fire hazards refrain from wearing clothing that could ignite or melt into their skin.

6. Confined Spaces

Frequent contributing factors to confined space incidents are insufficient programs and poor training. Employers must be aware of how to properly issue a permit and carry out a risk assessment. Employees must be trained on how to identify a confined space and proper entry techniques should the need arise. Also, there must be a confined space rescue plan in the event of an incident.

7. Transportation Incidents

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics data, nearly 40% of worker deaths each year are related to transportation. Some employers have to narrow a focus as far as drivers are concerned when it comes to the workplace. That means they may not have roadway safety in mind when a worker drives for a site visit, errand, conference or other work-related matter. Employers should be vigilant about providing training on preventing distracted driving behaviors while ensuring related policies are clear and routinely enforced.

Just a few reminders of potential hazards in the work place and a few tips on how to mitigate them as we head into the final quarter of 2024.

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