

Look Up for Overhead Dangers - Safety Talk Handout

Some of the worst hazards in any work area are the ones which are the least obvious - because they are overhead.

Overhead electrical power lines have caused countless deaths at work when people have accidentally contacted them with ladders, scaffolds, poles, pipes, vehicles and vehicle loads. Many of these accidents have involved high voltage lines, but some of them were only ordinary current.

Here are some reminders about avoiding contact with power lines and other overhead electrical installations:

- Before working near a power line, call the power company to have the current turned off or the lines guarded.
- Follow all safety regulations for working around power lines.
- These regulations will include keeping a specific distance away from power lines of certain voltages. This is because the power can arc through the air as it seeks the shortest route to the ground.
- Regulations will also require the use of a signal person stationed at a safe distance to direct the operator of a crane or another piece of heavy equipment and warn him if he is straying too close to the line.
- Always check for overhead electrical hazards when moving scaffolds, high loads and other objects which extend high into the air.
- Don't forget indoor electrical installations. Touching a light fixture with a metal ladder can be fatal.
- Don't forget overhead electrical hazards when doing home projects. Rooftop work such as installing a satellite receiver dish or replacing shingles can put you dangerously close to power lines.
- Watch for electrical connections under the eaves when painting or doing building renovations.
- If you are at the scene of a motor vehicle accident, look for fallen or sagging power lines.
- Power lines can also be knocked down in a storm. In winter, you might find yourself closer to a power line than you expected because you can't see it buried under snow.
- Keep trees and power lines apart. If a tree grows too close to a line, call a tree-trimming expert who will have the power shut off before proceeding with the work.

Other Overhead Hazards

There are other kinds of hazards overhead. Materials or tools can fall from work platforms above. Even a small object can pick up enough speed to cause a fatal head injury.

Elevated loads are another type of overhead hazard. Walking under a load elevated on a forklift, crane or other device is a risky practice.

Bumping your head on an overhead obstruction can cause you bruising or worse injuries.

Here are some reminders about protecting yourself and your co-workers from other overhead hazards:

- Wear your hardhat. It is made to give you protection from falling objects. Be sure to get the advice of your safety supervisor in choosing the right head protection. Certain hard hats give some protection against electrical hazards.
- Store materials safely. Do not place heavy objects out of sight in an overhead location where they can be pulled down by accident.
- Practice good housekeeping when working on elevated platforms to keep materials, debris and tools from falling. Place items where they cannot slide off or be knocked or kicked off the platform.
- Use toeguards, kickguards and screens around elevated work platforms to catch any items which might fall.
- Don't walk under these elevated work areas on or off the job - in building construction along a street, for example. Observe flagging and "off-limits" signs.
- Do not walk under elevated loads such as forklifts.

Use your head to avoid hazards over your head. Take care not to become entangled with overhead power lines or electrical installations. Use safe work practices to prevent objects falling from above.