Tool Box Talk

SCAFFOLD SAFETY

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When we need to work on an area higher than normal reach, the most common and cost effective item that can be used is scaffolding. The versatility of scaffolding systems can present the user with many options in it design and construction. As different as the structures can look, some basic safety information regarding this "tool of the trades" remains the same and should be considered.

Whether you are asked to assemble or work on scaffolding, a complete inspection of the components and work area can greatly reduce the chances of an incident happening. Often, incidents involving scaffolding can be prevented by completing a pre-assembly or pre-use hazard assessment. As with any inspection, we should be looking for current hazards and potential hazards that may arise as the job proceeds. This inspection should include but not be limited to the items listed below. As all situations are different, there is not one answer to these items. Rather, guidance will come from: input from competent people; plans drawn by qualified people; and consultation with the regulations.

Surface Conditions:

A scaffold, in most cases, needs to be set plumb and level to provide stability and to transfer the weight properly to the ground. The following items should be assessed before the scaffold is assembled:

- *Does the surface below have proper compaction?*

- *Will this surface change with the weather?* Firm frozen ground can melt and soften within hours. A scaffold that was set level in the morning can be dangerously leaning by afternoon.

- *Does the work area have a large slope?* Stacking small blocks of wood or other jobsite scrap items can create dangerous situations. There are proper components to safely level scaffold, or consultation with a supplier may provide a different scaffold system to be used.

- *Is the scaffold being placed on a man-made structure?* Take time to assess the support structure as you could be placing more weight on the structure than it can endure.

- *Is there traffic (pedestrians, vehicles, worksite equipment, etc.) in the surrounding area?*

Overhead Hazards:

Many times people forget to look up and identify overhead hazards. This is just as important as identifying the surface hazards, and many of these hazards change as the job progresses.

- *What is the location of all overhead power lines?* Proper clearance needs to be maintained as direct contact isn't needed for electrical shock to occur. Reference the table found in the regulations for minimum clearances.

 - *Are there any moveable overhead cranes, overhead doors, etc.?* These might not be present at the time of inspection, but could appear with little warning if working in an active building.

- *What, if any work, is being conducted above?* Items falling from above can seriously injure workers on a scaffold below. For example: welding roof decking can send hot sparks towards the area below.

Components

- *Are the scaffold components rusted?* Heavily rusted items will often not function as they were originally designed. For example: the smaller items, such as pins and clips, attached to metal frames are often the first to fail. The failure of these parts can lead to "Farmer Fixes," such as using tie wire, or replacing factory pins with nails and other improper Items. Rust can also be a sign of a cracked or damaged weld.

- *Are any of the parts bent or damaged?* Many components of scaffold systems are modular and meant to have other items stacked progressively on top. Being bent or twisted will affect how these parts stack. This can put a worker at risk when they attempt to assemble a bent section with much effort and little success.

- *Are the proper safety features installed?* Many different items are used to increase safety when working on a scaffold. Before each use, we should be checking our method of access, the handrail systems and the ties used to secure a scaffold to a structure.

Reviewing these items and any others that apply to your specific work area on a regular basis will help to keep awareness high and, hopefully, prevent hazards from becoming incidents.