

FALLS- From Different Levels

An employee climbs up on the back of a delivery truck and adjusts his load. As he pulls on a load securement strap, he falls four feet to the ground below. A half hour later, he is rolled into the emergency room for a compound fracture of the upper leg. Then the doctor visits, continued pain, and limited pay begin.

Every year thousands of workers get severely injured on the job as a result of falling from another level or elevation. Some due to not inspecting stairs and equipment, some due to improper use of stairs, steps or a ladder, and others from being in a rush. These accidents and serious injuries can be prevented if we slow down and take proper safety precautions. Ask- are we doing it the right way, following safety precautions? Or are we rushing around like a bumblebee collecting nectar?

At the beginning of each work shift, we should take a walk. Walk the work area and see if there are any items stacked or stored on the stairs. Sometimes we get in a hurry and place items on the stairs so we can return them to storage upstairs on our next trip. This presents a tripping hazard for all. We should use the handrails provided, keep 3 points of contact at all times on stairs, steps, ladders, and exiting forklifts. Take your time when navigating stairs, steps or ladders, one step at the time. Designate a staging area near the stairs for items to be returned upstairs; don't place them on the steps to become a tripping hazard.

When we get to the storage area, climbing the storage shelf/rack to obtain items rather than getting a step ladder or rolling platform ladder is not a good idea. Take a minute to get the appropriate ladder; and use it correctly. Ladders should be maintained in safe condition and used properly. All of us need training in the appropriate use of a ladder. It isn't as simple as leaning a ladder against a shelf and climbing. There are safety precautions to observe. Yet, sometimes we are not seeing well and we have a misstep in negotiating steps, because we haven't changed that light bulb or we haven't gotten our eyes checked lately or we haven't gotten that eye glass prescription filled yet. Take care of the simple things to prevent these serious accidents.

However, many falls occur because we don't let our supervisor/ management know there is an unsafe condition. The most common unsafe work condition is the unguarded elevated work surface, loading docks, mezzanines- you know, the place above the office where we sometimes store insulation, windows and doors. Any elevated surface more than 48" high where a human walks is considered an elevated work surface. IT should not be left open-sided or unguarded. And we are subject to fall and incur serious injury when we least expect it.

Recently, several workers were standing on the loading docks drinking sodas, taking a break. As they were talking, a yellow-jacket buzzed thru the area seeking the sugary substance in the soda. One of the guys was allergic to bee stings and suddenly stepped back several steps to avoid the yellow-jacket. Unfortunately, he was near the edge of the loading dock and fell several feet to the concrete, receiving a severe closed-head injury. It will be several years before he is able to resume a normal life, all because of a fall of a few feet. The loading dock area should have been appropriately guarded.

So, do your part to prevent falls from different levels. Inspect the work area. Report hazards to your supervisor. Correct any unsafe conditions immediately or report them to management. And follow safety precautions.