Don’t Let Wind Hazards Blow You Away

WHAT’S AT STAKE?

A sudden gust of wind can be annoying to most people as it blows dirt into their faces or sends hats flying. But if you work outdoors, the wind can damage much more than your previously cheerful mood.

WHAT’S THE DANGER?

Wind can’t be seen, but it can certainly be heard and felt. It can also occur with little warning, creating unpredictable and deadly hazards for workers. Winds have blown workers from roofs, toppled unstable walls onto workers and blown debris onto people working below. And even if a wind isn’t strong enough to move you, it can make the temperature feel much colder than a thermometer reads during cold weather months, increasing your odds of suffering hypothermia or frostbite.

Example

Two workers were roofing a large metal building in Nebraska when a wind gust caught a section of metal they were handling and blew both men off the roof onto the concrete 30 feet (nine meters) below.

One of the workers, age 61, died, while the other man was badly injured.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

While you will never know exactly when a sudden wind gust will occur, by listening to the day’s weather forecast you can know whether windy conditions are expected and take extra precautions while working outdoors.

Here are some safety tips to keep in mind when working in windy conditions:

- Watch weather forecasts for temperatures that include wind chill factors and dress in layers that can be added or removed as needed.
- When stepping outside a protected area into an open one, expect the possibility of a stiff wind.
- Use eye protection to keep dust from blowing into your eyes.
- Objects such as sheets of plywood can turn into powerful sails if they are caught by a wind gust and you are holding onto them. Don’t try to carry heavy or bulky items by yourself, especially if it’s windy. Ask for help in moving these materials.
- Never stand between the edge of an elevated surface and an object being carried. If measures to prevent falls aren’t in place, there’s nothing to stop you from plunging to a lower elevation.
- Avoid standing below a wall that isn’t stable or working near stacks of materials that could blow over onto you.
- Materials that could become airborne, with tragic results, need to be tied down against movement in a windstorm.
- Ensure that objects on stands are properly supported and can’t become unstable if a wind gust hits. Many workers have been injured or killed when the wind gets under a large object and hurls it into their path.
- Tightly secure tarps so they cannot be caught by the wind and knock materials or workers from an elevated surface.
- Ensure that ladders, scaffolds and wooden steps are stable in windy conditions. If you have any doubts, talk to your supervisor.

FINAL WORD

Many people dream of flying, but experiencing it by being carried off an elevated work surface by the wind would be a nightmare. Stay grounded by learning about the hazards and avoiding being in the wrong place at the wrong time.