Drywall Installation Stats and Facts

FACTS

1. Installing drywall can cause overexertion injuries, usually to the back, because drywall sheets are heavy and bulky. Injuries include strains, sprains, or tears and can range from minor to severe.
2. Workers should be aware that drywall sheets vary by thickness and weight: some sheets weigh less than 55 pounds, and others weigh more than 120 pounds. NIOSH has studied the relationship between lifting heavy objects and subsequent back pain. The NIOSH Lifting Equation (which is a formula for judging the risk of lifting heavy objects by the likelihood of subsequent back pain) suggests that lifting heavy objects such as drywall poses a high risk of back pain.
3. Falls are an additional major cause of injury during drywall installation. Fall-related injuries for drywall installers and carpenters can be caused by losing balance as a result of lifting, carrying, or holding heavy and bulky drywall sheets, or by other events, such as falls to a lower level from stairs.
4. Poor lighting and a wet or slippery work floor, along with obstruction of peripheral vision due to handling oversized drywall sheets, can place drywall installers and carpenters at risk of slip and fall incidents.
5. Many workers do not have enough hand grip strength to install drywall without risk of overexertion injury. Cold and wet conditions can make it more difficult. Even if a worker has good hand and body strength and uses good installation techniques, continued installation by hand can lead to significant overexertion injuries and loss of balance.

STATS

- The most common mechanisms of injury involved being struck (38.3%), overexertion (28.1%), and falls (13.2%) Struck by injuries most involved cuts to the upper extremity.
- Overexertion injuries were responsible for the greatest proportion of costs for medical care, permanent impairment, and paid lost days. The high rates of overexertion injuries among these workers is consistent with known ergonomic stresses on drywall jobs. However, these workers are also at high risk of acute traumatic injuries.
- The Occupational Injury and Illness Survey conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Drywall installers are at a high risk of overexertion and falls to a lower level. More than 40% of the injured drywall installers suffered sprains, strains, and/or tears. The most frequently injured body part was the trunk. More than one-third of the trunk injuries occurred while handling solid building materials, mainly drywall.
- NIOSH research found that the two main causes of injuries to drywall installers and carpenters are overexertion (37%) and falls (32%). These injuries frequently occur while workers are installing drywall sheets. A NIOSH survey of drywall installers and carpenters found that workers believed their biggest risk of physical stress was from lifting, carrying, or holding drywall.