Facilities Maintenance Safety

WHAT'S AT STAKE

As a maintenance worker, you are responsible for a lot – providing a steady flow of water, heat and cooling as well as upkeep of every part of the workplace. As a result you need to know about a broader range of safety issues than probably anyone else who works in the facility.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

Since you work in all areas of the facility, you encounter a variety of hazards from power equipment to paint vapors. You could be exposed to injury from electrocution, falls, chemical splashes, confined spaces and other dangers.

EXAMPLE

A hospital maintenance worker did some plumbing on a leaking sewer pipe without wearing a complete outfit of personal protection equipment. The line broke and he was partially soaked in sewer water. He lived for days in fear until medical testing assured him that he apparently had not caught a disease from being exposed to bodily-fluid pathogens; he was lucky.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Wear the gear

Face shields, water-repellant boots and coveralls are part of your protection against a sewer spill. From safety-toed boots to hardhat, you need personal protection equipment (PPE) suitable for each task. Pulling nails requires a different set of gloves than cleaning up a chemical spill. You need to have safety glasses and wear them, as well as wear earplugs or earmuffs when needed.

Hazard communication

If a department or laboratory in the facility uses chemicals, make sure you know where and what the chemicals are. Read the material safety data sheet for each chemical you use, and make sure you know where to find the MSDS fast in an emergency.

Electrical

Obey signs warning of any electrical hazard. Don’t work with electricity if not qualified to do so. Don’t stand on an aluminum ladder when working near electrical wiring.

Lock out

When working with power equipment and power sources, beware of unexpected release of energy. The lockout/tagout system protects you and others, and safety laws require it.

Beware asbestos

You may encounter asbestos in an older facility while stringing telephone cable or installing electrical wires. Likewise, renovations may spill loose asbestos. Employers should hire outside contractors for large-scale removal of asbestos. Even if you do small-scale removal, you need special training and authorization. Learn how to establish a protective zone so others are not exposed either.

FINAL WORD

Maintenance workers encounter many hazards, so safety is the Number One priority.