Maintenance and Safety Go Hand in Hand

Safety Talk

As a maintenance worker, you are responsible for a lot—providing a steady flow of water, heat and cooling, as well as being involved with 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 in your workplace.

What's at Stake

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.

What Can Go Can Go Wrong

A hospital maintenance worker performed some plumbing work on a leaking sewer pipe without wearing a complete outfit of personal protective 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 sewage spill. From safety-toed boots to hardhat, you need personal protective 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 safety data sheet for each chemical you use, and make sure you know where to find safety data sheets quickly in an emergency.

- **Electrical**
  Obey signs warning of any electrical hazard. Don’t work with electricity if you’re not qualified to do so. Never stand on an aluminum ladder when working near electrical wiring.

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

- **Beware of asbestos**
  You may encounter asbestos in an older facility while stringing telephone cable or installing electrical wires. Likewise, renovations may release asbestos fibers into the air. Only people who are trained and authorized in the safe removal of asbestos should be performing that task.

Final Word

Maintenance workers encounter many hazards, so safety must be your number one priority.