Preventing Injuries Away from the Job

Not all fatal accidents happen at work. Many of us practice safe work procedures on the job but forget those practices at home. This is somewhat understandable. At work, supervisors and safety managers are constantly watching us.

But when we get home, we become the boss and we get complacent. And we all know that complacency leads to trouble.

Home Injuries & their Causes

The statistics on home injuries may surprise you. According to the National Safety Council, there were 33,200 fatalities and 8,000,000 disabling injuries in the home in 2001. The four leading causes were:

- Poisoning
- Falls
- Fires (burns)
- Suffocation caused by ingesting an object

Poisoning killed 11,500 people in 2001, with falls a close second at 9,000. If those numbers don't wake you up then consider this: A fatal injury in the home occurs every 16 minutes and a disabling injury occurs every four seconds.

What Can We Do?

Well, the answer is quite simple: All we have to do is think in the same safe manner at home as we do at work. Take a moment to consider the task you're about to perform and how you can perform it safer. Here's a "Safe Plan of Action" to provide your workers for working around the house safely:

- Plan ahead. Make sure you have the proper PPE for the task—gloves, safety glasses, long pants or long-sleeve shirts, steel-toed shoes with steel shanks, etc. The easiest way to do this is to visualize yourself doing the job and

try to identify any potential hazards.

- Check your tools and equipment. Using the wrong tool can be dangerous. I regularly inspect all my power/hand tools and ladders to make sure they're not damaged and are suitable for the job. I look for signs of obvious wear and tear that could cause failure during use. Remember that falls are near the top of the list as the cause of injuries and/or fatalities.
- Lift right. Just like at work, poor lifting techniques are a common cause of injury at home. While lifting or bending, don't strain your body. If you can't lift something easily, use a hand truck (or other lifting device) to move it.
- Practice ladder safety. Avoid overreaching while working on ladders or raised platforms. It's much safer to move the ladder and stay as vertical as possible.
- Guard against heat stress. During the summer months, if you're going to be working outdoors or indoors in spaces that aren't air-conditioned or well ventilated, remember to drink plenty of water to avoid heat exhaustion. Take regular breaks when needed.
- Watch for overhead power lines. Remember how dangerous overhead power lines are. Get a helper to assist in carrying long items such as metal pipe, extension ladders or other conductive materials.
- Ask the right question. I've saved the most important step for last. Ask yourself: "Is this safe?" I can't stress this enough. This quick question could save your life.

Conclusion

Here's a story you might want to relay to your workers: On a jobsite years ago, there was one individual who resented his supervisor for correcting his unsafe work practices all the time. He even resorted to calling the supervisor names as he walked by.

One lunch hour, the supervisor took his brown bag into the field and spotted the worker sitting with co-workers. He asked if he could join his group. It was obvious that he didn't want the supervisor there, but gestured with his hand that he could sit

down if he wanted. The supervisor then asked him, “When you go home at night and walk though the door, what happens?”

After some hesitation, he replied, “My dogs usually run to me and my daughter and wife give me a kiss. Then we sit down for supper.”

This was exactly the response he was hoping for. The supervisor told him, “It doesn’t matter to me that you hate me or call me names. Every day that you can go through that door and be greeted by your family and pets is one more day that I have done my job well.”

The two were friends for the rest of the work project and still keep in touch today.