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Toolbox Talk – Ladder Safety

Date _____ **Company Name** _____
Supervisor _____ **Job Name** _____

Ladders are a common cause of injuries within worksites. In fact, OSHA statistics state that nearly 1/3 of all falls occur from ladders. These falls can be as painful as a fall from a roof. Many fall-related injuries result from the improper use of a ladder, or the use of a defective ladder. Use this Toolbox Talk with your employees to ensure that they use the correct ladders for different tasks, and to ensure that they follow all safety precautions when using ladders.

Guidelines for Discussion

As contractors, we rely on ladders for a lot of tasks. Ladders are simple, universal tools, and so it is easy for us to get sloppy when using them. We may be in a rush to fix something and not properly set up the ladder. We may simply need to grab an item from a high place, and so use the closest ladder in sight (regardless of its intended application). When working with ladders, we need to slow down and follow strict safety rules. Otherwise, we could be risking injury and death for ourselves and for our coworkers.

Before working with a ladder, briefly inspect it:

- Look for missing or loose cleats at the bottom.
- Look for loose or missing screws, bolts or nails. If you find a loose screw, attempt to tighten it with a screwdriver. Replace missing screws.
- Look for cracked, broken, split, dented or badly-worn rungs, cleats or side rails. Look for splinters on wood ladders. If possible, smooth splinters with sandpaper.
- Look for excessive corrosion or rust on metal ladders

If any of the above defects are present and you cannot fix them on your own, then report the problem to your supervisor. DO NOT use defective ladders.

After you have inspected your ladder, heed the following during use:

- Always use the right ladder for the right job.
- When setting up your ladder, make sure that you aren't blocking a walkway or door.
- Keep the rungs of the ladder clear of cords, tools, materials and garbage. This ensures that you won't trip when walking up or down the ladder.
- Always set the ladder on solid footing.
- Use a twenty-five percent (25%) angle on the slope of the ladder.
- When using an extension ladder, the top three rungs must extend beyond the landing platform, or the top of an extension ladder must be 36" (3 feet) above the landing.
- Do not lean to the side when on a ladder. Eventually, you will tip over.
- Use both hands when climbing a ladder, and use the side rails when necessary. If you need to transfer material or tools up a ladder, climb up first and then pull up the materials with a hand line.
- Only allow one person on a ladder at a time (unless the ladder is built to support two people).

- Always secure the top of the ladder to prevent it from sliding (tie it off).
- Never lean a step ladder or A-frame ladder – these must always be fully open when in use.
- Always face the ladder when climbing.

Case Study:

The following is based on a true story. This illustrates the importance of ladder safety, and how a series of shortcuts can prove to be fatal.

Joshua was a contractor, and he was helping his neighbor with a leaky roof. The neighbor’s home was a low-pitched single story home, about eight feet high between the ground and eaves. Joshua borrowed a ladder to go up and patch the problem (until his team could come to permanently fix the leak). However, Joshua grabbed just the top half of an extension ladder without safety feet on the bottom.

Joshua placed the ladder on his neighbor’s concrete patio. He leaned it against the house, and it only stretched to one rung above the landing surface. Joshua grabbed a large, nearby rock to hold down the roof’s felt, and he began to climb.

While going up the ladder, Joshua continued chatting with his neighbor. When he got ready to step off the ladder onto the roof, the ladder slipped and fell away. Joshua dropped the rock as he fell backwards toward the concrete patio. The rock bounced on the patio, striking Joshua on the back of his head. He never regained consciousness and died later that night. Joshua was a contractor for twenty years, and he left behind three children and four grandchildren.

If we consider Joshua’s story, we can catch many safety violations that, if corrected, could have prevented his death. (Here, ask your employees to list the problems with Joshua’s approach to fixing his neighbor’s leak.)

- Joshua should have used the full extension ladder. A ladder should never be used in a manner that differs from its manufactured intent, and he especially should not have used a ladder without safety feet.
- The extension ladder should have extended at least three rungs above the rooftop.
- Joshua should have climbed to the roof, then reached down to grab the rock from his neighbor (or a similar plan). Joshua should not have climbed with something in his hands.
- Joshua should have secured the top of the ladder.
- Joshua should have been focused while climbing the ladder, rather than distracting himself through conversation with his neighbor.

Additional Discussion Notes:

At the end of this Toolbox Talk, name the different kinds of ladders available to your employees and briefly describe the best function for each.

Safety Recommendations

Job Specific Topics

Attendees

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