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Stick to the basics for safety: The results will be fewer accidents and a better bottom line

March 06, 2008 - Owners Developers & Managers

Prevention is not just a buzzword for the American health care system, it has also become a focal point to increase safety standards in the window cleaning and exterior maintenance industries.

Safety precautions are mandated by OSHA, ANSI and other regulatory bodies. Taking measures to prevent accidents can not only protect your employees (and others near your work sites) from injury, it can also increase your business and decrease your insurance rates.

In many cases, it is simply a matter of planning ahead. One easy plug-in to planning ahead is taking advantage of the wide " and growing " range of safety-related equipment on the market. Many of these are a result of new industry safety standards and below are some tips which can increase the safety of your workers and your work sites significantly.

Minimizing Risk in Ladder Work

Ladder work continues to be a mainstay in the window cleaning industry. Perhaps as a consequence of its popularity, ladder-related accidents account for the largest number of workplace injuries in construction- and maintenance-related fields. In the vast majority of these accidents, misuse of the ladder was the cause.

In addition to proper training for employees involved in ladder work, there are several types of ladder accessories which can improve safety performance and reduce accidents:

- * Ladder leg levelers easily attach to the ladder base to stabilize it for use on non-level surfaces such as stairs or sloping ground.
- * Ladder stand-offs with two stabilizing arms attach to the top of the ladder, distributing weight more evenly and providing enhanced support and stability.
- * Locking pins add an important degree of safety when using sectional ladders, to ensure that sections won't separate during use.
- * Make sure you follow the manufacturer's instructions with regards to the maximum height of the assembled ladder when it comes using sectional ladders.

Safe Use of Suspended Equipment

Rope descending equipment is a popular choice for high rise work. When first introduced, regulations regarding its use were minimal. Now these systems are carefully regulated by OSHA and the ANSI/IWCA I 14 Standard.

With both rope descending systems and suspended scaffolding, fall protection is a must. Workers must wear a body harness attached to a lifeline with a lanyard and rope grab. Remember to incorporate shock absorbing features in your fall arrest equipment in order to reduce the physical impact on a falling person.

Proper use and maintenance of equipment for high rise work is essential. Ropes can be a particularly vulnerable area, and must be inspected, maintained and replaced regularly. Here are

several tips to keep your ropes in good working condition:

- * Always use rope protector pads on your rope around sharp building edges or cornices to prevent chafing and abrasion.
- * Keeping ropes clean is critical to the life of the rope. Several devices are available which make rope cleaning quite easy.
- * Flip your ropes over every so often to evenly distribute wear and don't leave your ropes hanging on a building when you're not using them.

Ensuring the Safety of Those Below

Don't forget that one of the uncontrollable hazards faced everyday by window cleaners is working overhead of areas where people may travel or congregate.

The impact of a tool or object dropped in the course of above ground work can cause considerable damage or injury to people or property below. It is essential to secure the area beneath high rise work to prevent public access and raise awareness

Remember to set up your danger signs and barricades well before you are going to work on or over an area where people may be in the way of your operation.

Proper Training, Standards and Documentation

OSHA's experience over the past 20 years indicates that most workplace accidents could have been avoided if sufficient preventative steps had been taken. This means that even small companies like a window cleaning business, can face fines running into thousands of dollars. And it makes sound training procedures, comprehensive documentation and attention to safety and accident prevention all the more important to the success of your business.

Equipment, regulations and documentation aside, the most important resource required for accident prevention and safety is your time and your attention. Make safety a priority for yourself, your management team, and your employees. You'll see the results in fewer accidents, healthier and more productive employees, and in your bottom line business.

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