

S•A•F•E•T•Y

A PARTNERSHIP FOR CONTRACTORS AND ROOF CONSULTANTS

By Bill McHugh

Safety: It's a rather generic, all-encompassing term that we use a lot, and maybe take for granted. Whether a roofer taking in the daily work environment, an estimator measuring or checking progress, a consultant performing a survey or inspection, or a building owner or manager up on the roof for a semi-annual cleaning; after a while, we can all get a bit too complacent about where we are and make a simple mistake that could cost a life.

In the 1960s, seat belts were optional in some cars. Now there are redundant back-up systems, from seat belts with shoulder harnesses to airbags. If you drive a Mini Cooper, you'll find 11 airbags. Commercial buildings used to use just fire-resistance-rated construction and effective compartmentalization as the only protection for occupants of office buildings, schools, hospitals, factories, and other structures. Now there are detection and alarm systems that notify of trouble, sprinkler systems to suppress the blaze until the fire department arrives, plus fire-resistance-rated compartmentalization and structural protection. Windows are impact-rated to keep us from falling out and Mother Nature from coming in. Airplanes have several back-up systems to keep them flying. We have smoke alarms at home, carbon monoxide detectors, firewalls between the garage and house, and even sprinklers in residences. And on and on.

There are numerous redundant back-up systems now wherever we are to protect us. The roofing workplace safety environment has changed as well. It used to be that we'd climb a wooden, 40-ft ladder onto a roof, and we'd go to work – no safety lines, no roof-edge markers or skylight fall protection systems.

Today, there are several safety technologies for use on the roof. Fall protection has

been developed for skylights, with safety flags at roof edges to warn workers of danger, and safety lines for workers to tie off on roofs. Some building owners and managers are going so far as to build scaffolding to secure the perimeter to protect people entering or exiting a building, either in emergency evacuation or just day-to-day business.

Safety – we all take it for granted. Someone else is protecting us, making sure we're safe. Is safety really someone else's problem? Should it be? Shouldn't it be both our own personal and someone else's problem?

Unlike fire drills, emergencies and accidents are never planned events. Fires in buildings are rarer than in the early 1900s, due to technology to control lighting, electricity, and ignition sources in buildings. Safety procedures exist for building engineers that help keep the structure safe. But accidents still happen.

When was the last time you entered a strange building, went to the roof, and never thought about how to get off the roof and to safety in an emergency? How many ways are there to get off the roof safely, or should one stay put in an emergency, waiting for rescue? Bert Polk, a representative of the National Association of State Fire Marshals, would quickly ask, "Do you carry a flashlight? Remember, the first thing to go in an emergency typically is the power." Without a flashlight, one may be able to get off the roof into a building, but in dark stairwells, they might get lost. Or, if staying in a hotel at night, asleep in a strange place, "darkness can be very disorienting," states Polk.

What about safety on a roof? Have you become complacent? Whether estimator, worker, or roofing company owner, it can happen to any of us. Do we get too comfortable about working at the roof edge? Around skylights? What about productivi-

ty? Are we concerned about productivity so much that safety is compromised? Maybe. How long were we scared to ride a bike? To drive? How routine is it now?

With that in mind, perhaps we should remember that feeling we had the first time we walked to the roof edge of a 2-story building or a 40-story building. What did it feel like the first time we ascended a 40-ft wood ladder and climbed onto the roof? Did we check how it was set up and tied off? Memory, with some fear, can have a positive effect, as long as we're not overcome by the fear.

The Chicago Roofing Contractors Association (CRCA) safety committee has existed for decades and prides itself on a culture of safety. CRCA has invested much volunteer time from both management and workers to create this culture of safety. Here are some examples:

Chicagoland Roofing Safety Partnership

CRCA partnered with OSHA's local and national offices to develop a program that rewards those firms that have invested in safety and have quantifiable results to prove it. For firms with an experience modification rate (EMR) less than 0.95, a safe work record, a good history with OSHA, and a written safety policy acceptable to the OSHA Partnership, they are recognized as CRSP Leader Contractors. CRSP Leader Contractors receive recognition for their commitment to safety.

Seminars

CRCA and the local Chicago OSHA office have teamed up to present seminars to the Chicago roofing community – CRCA member and non-member roofing contractors – about safety. These seminars have created a working dialogue between the contractors and OSHA, and have been well attended. Additionally, new seminars are being devel-

CRITERIA FOR LEADER CONTRACTOR STATUS

Roofing contractors must pass some tough requirements to become Chicagoland Roofing Safety Partnership (CRSP) Leader Contractors with CRCA and OSHA.

- Contractors must have injury and illness rates at an average 10% or more below the current national average for the roofing industry.
- Contractors must have a good history with OSHA (no willful or repeat violations within a three-year period and no serious citations related to a fatality within a three-year period).
- Contractors must have an experience modification rate (EMR) of 0.95 or lower, which must be on broker letterhead.
- Contractors must have a comprehensive written safety and health program in place, which is equivalent to OSHA, ANSI, or NRCA safety and health program guidelines.

The current program is being redesigned by CRCA and OSHA to increase effectiveness of the partnership. Contractors who have participated over the past few years can be found on the CRCA Web site, http://crca.org/Resources/safety_info.htm.

oped that can benefit roofers, contractors, and those we serve. For example, the seminar on fire safety is being jointly developed with the Illinois Fire Inspectors Association, CRCA, and OSHA.

The CRCA Trade Show offers education to contractors about safety. "We recruited a ladder manufacturer and dealer to discuss design and use, to understand the designed functions of a ladder by the manufacturer to its real-life use," stated CRCA Show Chair Chris Adler. Frank Marino of Safety Check, Inc., CRCA's safety consultant, presented, with a manufacturer, a new safety tie-off cart and its proper use.

Recently, Chicagoland Roofing Council contractors demonstrated to the Chicago OSHA offices at the Chicagoland Joint Apprenticeship Training Center roof edge tear-off procedures, documenting so others at OSHA could work with CRCA in developing safety procedures to handle the edge tear off conditions, plus other everyday situations. Both hand and power tools were used to show how roofers handle tear-off at the roof edge of a non-parapet wall roof system.

"We believe that by working together, we can understand the needs and concerns of all involved and develop meaningful safety programs for our workers, estimators, own-

ers, and all who are the lifeblood of our organizations," states CRCA's 2006 president, Joe McDevitt. "Safety has been a part of our mission since the late 1800s, and we need to keep plowing new ground to get better." Mike Adler, CRCA's Safety Chairman added, "We did the demonstrations for OSHA so we can develop credible safety procedures together as a team. We're all invested in safety."


Most roofing companies are small businesses where employees stay for many years, becoming second family to contractors. They know each other's families, train each other's kids, and have a special fellowship. "I'm a third generation roofing contractor. We have several employees who have spanned generations working for us and our family. When we're finished with our careers, we want to leave the roof safer than we found it," stated Adler.

"At the January 2004 Chicago Area Chapter of RCI and joint Region III annual meeting in Chicago, CRCA presented a safety program for roof consultants," states

McDevitt. The program focused on what an RCI member should look for in safety procedures and practices from a professional roofing contractor. "We value the safety of everyone that works in our industry...and want roofing consultants to be safe while conducting an inspection. We all have someone on the ground who wants us to return safely," said McDevitt, who was also CRCA Safety Committee 2004 Chair. Most important, the seminar covered what RCI members should be practicing in regards to safety.

Safety starts below, on the ground, before climbing to the roof. What do you do to be sure you are safe, regardless of your role in the roofing industry? Do you still inspect the roof deck from the underside to be sure it's structurally stable? Do you tie off when working close to the roof edge? How do you handle walking backwards with and without equipment? Are skylights protected? Are you tied off at all?

The roofing industry is one of the most difficult trades. The work environment demands much physically, while simultaneously requiring mental awareness of technical material application, as well as safety. Roofing-related professions deal with the cold of winter and the heat of summer, then sudden, approaching rain requires scrambling to quickly cover insulation. With all people must think about in their personal and professional lives, safety needs must be constantly addressed and never taken for granted.

As with the rest of the activities in our lives, it's the small accident that can have deadly results. All it takes is one small slip, one little misstep. How do we want to operate on a roof? "Prepared" should be the answer. Think about redundancy for protection. Safety is no longer a single dimension. Think safety for your own well being... but also for those who want you to come home. 

Bill McHugh

Bill McHugh is Executive Director of the Chicago Roofing Contractors Association. He has been in the construction industry in roofing, waterproofing, and firestopping for 25 years. Visit CRCA's Web site at www.crca.org to learn more about CRCA.

MOST TREMENDOUS TOTAL TEAR-OFF

Interface wants to know what projects consultants have seen or worked on that had the most different layers of tear-off. We want to find the thickest roof out there. The roof that wins the Princess and the Pea contest: layer after layer after layer after layer – and still, it leaked! Send your experiences to Kris at kammerman@rci-online.org.