

SAFETY

and the ROOF CONSULTANT

BY NELSON HALL

To date I am not aware of a fatal roof-top accident involving a Roof Consultant. If it hasn't happened already, it is only a matter of time. It will happen.

During my career in the roofing industry I have known people who have been injured and even killed by falling from a roof. Some have fallen over the perimeter, some through an unprotected opening through the deck, and some simply stepped on an unsound section of decking. Injuries from improper ladder use are also common causes of deaths and injuries.

In our business in the Carolinas, more of our customers are demanding that roofing contractors practice a sound fall prevention policy. It only stands to reason that the same requirements will be imposed on professional roof consultants and inspectors. In fact, it already is required by our customers on several projects.

When our customers first started to demand that our field personnel adhere to OSHA mandates, we did not take the issue as seriously as we should have. Most of our employees have been around the construction industry for quite a while and realize that most accidents occur while workers are trying to complete a task and have permitted safety priorities to slip. As a general rule we are observing and reporting roof-top conditions, and for most of us, the danger factor didn't seem as relevant. This was a mistake.

Four years ago, our company got a rude wake-up call. While attending the RCJ Annual Convention in Reno, I received a call that one of our key employees had fallen off of a roof during a final inspection. As he was getting down from the roof, the ladder slipped. Safety Lesson Number One: a bungee cord hooked to metal coping will not hold a ladder after it starts to slide. He suffered a cracked vertebrae and broken bones in both feet. He was out of work for three months.

The most eye-opening aspect of this injury was that the ladder procedures used by this individual were common practice within our company and this industry as a whole. The result was a great deal of pain for our employee and a major expense for our company and our insurance carrier. Also, our Workers' Compensation policy was promptly canceled.

One of my first responses was to seek training for our employees to minimize the probability of recurrence. The source we selected was the OSHA 10-hour course. I contracted with a professional training company to provide the approved course to all of our employees who work in the field.

Along with fall prevention and protection training, we also received training in several other areas associated with the safe



Flammable materials should be properly stored. Fire cabinet is secured to roof penetrations and is easily identifiable as containing flammable materials.



Consultants often use contractors' ladders. This ladder is properly secured and safe to use to access the roof.

performance of our job requirements

Another source of roof-top danger is high voltage equipment and/or wires. They are commonly unprotected or poorly protected on the roof. Some dangerous, high-voltage situations are not even marked and contact in some instances can turn your lights out permanently.



This worker is improperly using a safety belt for fall protection. Fall prevention and fall protection are different and require different equipment and procedures. If you are going to be exposed to a fall hazard, you must know the difference in order to protect yourself.



Contractor warning lines also apply to consultants in most cases.

Other hazards include but are not limited to heat problems, cuts, and burns. Our safety training includes drug and alcohol impairment and other issues which address fitness for duty. Other training covers HAZCOM, MSDS forms, fire prevention, and first aid.

It should be noted that completion of an OSHA 10-hour course does not qualify one as a safety expert. In my opinion this course makes you aware of potential hazards and teaches you how to use the OSHA manual as needed in order to perform your duties safely.

Having personnel trained in safe work practices creates an uneasy situation when employees observe unsafe work practices by others during the performance of consulting and inspection duties. The industry practice is that consultants and inspectors do not direct or manage the contractors' work. But if we observe a life-threatening situation on the roof, our employees are instructed to advise the people involved that the situation appears unsafe and that appropriate safety personnel need to be involved so that the work can proceed without injury or harm.

Safety is an individual as well as collective responsibility. Prudence dictates that an alert, pro-active, common-sense approach best meets the need to provide an accident-free workplace.

It took a serious accident for our company to realize that safety should be our first priority. Logic should convince most folks that no matter how quickly the roof-top work is performed, it's better not to finish the report in the hospital. In the long run, taking time to be safe is the fastest way to completion.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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W. Nelson Hall, RRC

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