

# Overhead Work Safety

Toolbox Talk #14



Sometimes while working on jobsites, the tasks that need to be completed take place overhead. Workers may be required to reach up with one or both arms raised above their shoulders, with their head tilted back to see what they are doing. Work could take place under a bridge, from an aerial lift or simply on the ground using a drill to drive screws overhead. No matter what type of work, overhead work puts stress on the shoulders and neck. Not recognizing this hazard and not taking the necessary precautions could eventually result in serious muscle and joint injuries.

**The risk of injury can increase when working overhead for long periods of time, especially when holding tools, equipment or materials above shoulder height.** Twisting your body while your arms are in an awkward position, or repetitive movements combined with the use of force can also add to the risk, as can lifting, holding and positioning heavy or awkward objects while your arms are raised.

Overhead work is a common part of our day-to-day work, and the good news is it can be performed safely. There are solutions available that can reduce the level of stress on your shoulders, neck and arms, as well as reduce how often and how long the body is subjected to this stress. Many of the solutions can also eliminate other potential safety hazards and increase productivity.

The type of task and the site conditions will determine which solutions are best for you. A few possible solutions for specific overhead tasks are:

- **Change materials or work processes.** Use materials, building components or work methods that are less labor-intensive so the task takes less time and you reach overhead for a shorter period.
- **Change tools and/or equipment.** For example, use bit extensions for drills and screw guns that allow you to hold the tool at waist or shoulder level rather than above your head. Use mechanical lifts or hoists to raise and position yourself closer to the work.
- **Change work rules and provide training.** Workers need to be made aware of the hazards and be trained on the safest way to perform their work. They should be encouraged to utilize every resource available to them to make overhead work a safe experience.

As with most of the activities and tasks performed in our work, there are hazards that can result in some type of injury or illness to our bodies. It is critical to plan your work and work your plan. Devise a plan that allows you to perform work in a safe manner.



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