SAFETY VIDEO DIALOGUE

Workers Defense Project

HEAT

Construction work in Texas has its own challenges. Sometimes working outdoors is unpleasant and very dangerous if you do not know how to take care of yourself. You have to pay attention to humidity and be aware of heat strokes, because it could happen to any person at any time. If you have a heat stroke the best that could happen to you is that your work would diminish, and the worst that could happen would be losing your life.

I am here with Jorge. It is nice meeting you. We are here to discuss how you should work in order to ameliorate and prevent weather effects, particularly when it is hot.

Jorge: Well, here in Texas we have whole weeks during the summer with temperatures no lower than 100 F and with high humidity in the environment. Our bodies are not used to these weather conditions of high heat and humidity. They cannot stay fresh due to transpiration and can be stressed by heat, a condition commonly known as sunstroke.

Interviewer: Jorge can you tell me how is that different from feeling hot?

Jorge: Sunstroke is the sign that your body is not working well anymore due to an excess of heat. It can happen to anybody and can be fatal if it is not treated on time.

Interviewer: Heat and humidity provoke stress. It makes sense. People should consider this when they work outdoors with the sun hitting directly on them and there is no breeze.

Jorge: Yes, it makes a lot of sense. If you know you will be working outdoors you should follow some advices. First of all you need to keep yourself hydrated. You should avoid drinking alcohol and caffeine, because they accelerate dehydration. You also need to take breaks. You work for a period of time and then rest under the shade, and rehydrate. This way you prevent sunstroke.

Interviewer: It seems that this situation happens a lot during the summer. How do I know when I am feeling just too hot or if I am really experiencing a sunstroke or heat stroke?

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Jorge: With sunstroke people tend to have headaches, feel dizzy and might faint. They might also feel weak and throw up. Their mood changes, they become grumpy and confused as if they were lost or did not know what is going on.

Interviewer: Is that how sunstroke feels like?

Jorge: Yes, that is how sunstroke feels like.

Interviewer: How is it different from a heat stroke?

Jorge: Sunstroke is dangerous, but heat stroke is way more serious and it could be fatal. One of the most important differences between sunstroke and heatstroke is that with the former your skin is humid and with the latter it is dry, hot, and with no sweat. People start to feel confused but the worst symptom is when they have convulsions. This is very dangerous because it can lead to death.

Interviewer: It is really hot here, let's go to the shade and keep talking.

Jorge: Yes.

Interviewer: Fortunately, thanks to WDP efforts in collaboration with the City of Austin the city now allows construction workers a 10-15 minutes break every 3½ hours. It is important to consider other things such as refreshing every 15 minutes, taking water or sports drinks, and wearing baggy and light color clothes.

Jorge: Also making sure that all coworkers are able to identify the symptoms and distinguish between sunstroke and heat stroke. If someone feels bad due to heat excess, this is what we can do: Call 911, place that person in a cooler and ventilated area, loosen his clothes, make him sip water, make sure he is breathing well and that no one is blocking his access to oxygen. You can also moisten his body with water to lower its temperature.

Interviewer: If one person suffers from a heat stroke and stops sweating he obviously cannot help himself and will need other people to help him.

Jorge: Of course.

Interviewer: Thanks Jorge for meeting us and for sharing these practical and simple ideas to prevent sunstrokes and heat strokes.

INTERACTIVE

1. It is too hot to be working without taking breaks and without taking any water, but I am afraid of telling something to the boss, because he could fire me and send me home.

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2. I already took a glass of water in the morning and I have been drinking coffee all day long. I have always worked under the heat and nothing has ever happened to me. I am sure I am going to be just fine.

3. It has been such a hot day and I feel very bad. I have been working and my head is hurting really bad, and I even feel like throwing up.

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ELECTRICITY

We all know that working with electricity is very common, although it is dangerous. Each day a worker dies due to electricity. The majority of workers are not electricity specialists they are only using wrong wires or cables. To learn more about electricity let's meet Quirino Juárez.

Interviewer: How are you?

Quirino: Hi, how are you? How have you been doing?

Interviewer: I just wanted to make you a question. What is a non-electricity worker most common mistake?

Quirino: Ok, that is a very good question. Most of the time, when people get electrocuted it is because they are not using tools correctly. To prevent being electrocuted you need to check all the equipment to make sure it is in good condition. This will help prevent problems constantly caused by accidents.

Interviewer: While I was working I was handed a wire that was torn, can you plug an extension like this one?

Quirino: Well, before you use a wire or cable, that is, an extension like this, you need to check it, making sure everything is fine.

Interviewer: You mean that it is not torn or broken?

Quirino: Exactly, that it is not torn or has broken parts. For example, this one is missing a ground pin.

Interviewer: I see, it is called ground pin.

Quirino: Yes, and it is torn on the other side so it can't be used.

Interviewer: Can I tape it to cover the torn? Would that work?

Quirino: No, that is not right.

Interviewer: Should I not try it then?

Quirino: No, don't try because it is very dangerous. It is not right, don't do it. What we have to do is mark this cable and throw it away.

Interviewer: To the garbage can?

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Quirino: Exactly.
Interviewer: Great!

Quirino: I am going to show you a wire-cable that you can actually use. Look, in order to know if a cable or wire is authorized, it should have proper covering and a protection device to alleviate the tension. Only use those cables that are designed for heavy work, they will be marked every 2 feet and those are the ones you should use for the type of work you do.

Interviewer: Great! I came to work and I brought my cable. Can I plug it over there?

Quirino: No, you cannot plug it there because it is already full. You can't plug more cables there because it will overheat. You can't use that plug.

Interviewer: But that is the way I do it at my place where I have like twenty plugs in the same plug and nothing has ever happened to me.

Quirino: Well, maybe the voltage is lower in your place than it is here. At the construction site the voltage is more powerful and you cannot do that. What I recommend is a GFCI. You plug it on-to the wall and you can place your cable here.

Interviewer: I can plug it now?

Quirino: Look at that puddle. Never try crossing a cable or any other equipment over a puddle. You should use equipment with double isolation when doing your work. This is the symbol for double isolation. You don't need three pins. This is one of the things that I would recommend you. Be careful with the puddle. Look, try not to pick it from the floor. Before picking it up you have to unplug it. Now you can pick up your appliance-machine.

Interviewer: Are we good now?

Quirino: Yes, you can pick it up know. It is dangerous to have the extension close to a puddle, because if the appliance-machine falls in the water you can get electrocuted. To avoid this it is better to first unplug it and then you can pick it up.

Interviewer: I am so glad I am outdoors! This way I do not have to worry about electricity because I work with manual tools.

Quirino: Well, that is not right. Even if you do not work with electric equipment, remember there are plenty cables above and if a scaffold is touching them and you happen to touch the scaffold you can get electrocuted. Also, you can get electrocuted if a crane is touching those cables. The best way to do it is locating the work place, inspecting the area where you will be working, so that nothing is touching electricity cables.

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Interviewer: If there are several cables all around my work place and I am using a crane, I need to be very careful with the way I move it and raise it to carry the material up.

Quirino: You are saying you are not an operator, that you do not use electric equipment, only manual ones, and if you accidentally touch that crane, and the crane is touching a cable, it could be very dangerous.

Interviewer: What could possibly happen to me?

Quirino: You would get electrocuted.

Interviewer: I would be very scared and I would die. That would be such an electric shock!

Quirino: Never assume that it is safe to touch a cable even if it seems it is isolated. Also, another important thing is that all electric equipment should be kept at least 10 feet away from the electric cable. Scaffolds should be farther enough. If something seems too close, you should let your supervisor know about it. If a cable falls down while you are driving, remain inside and keep driving, and if your car stops, remain inside until you receive news about the cable not being electrified.

Interviewer: What if there is an emergency and I have to leave the vehicle?

Quirino: If you need to leave the vehicle, you should try jumping with your two feet, without touching the vehicle and the ground at the same time.

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PROTECT YOURSELF

1. Luciano Márquez-Day Laborer

We normally work on these roofs, which usually are sheer and get slippery when wet. No, we do not use harnesses. Nobody has told us to use them.

2. Alan Shephard-General Contractor

A lot of people working in construction think that the key to this business is reducing costs and time. This will ultimately lead to a dangerous situation causing serious injuries or even death.

3. Luis Galindo-Responsible for the project

Climb the ladder!

Boss: You gotta be kidding me! What is going on here? I thought I told you guys I want a lot more work done. What is going on here?

Worker: I know boss, but we are trying to work as fast as possible, we are using the ladder the way you taught us last week.

Boss: Listen, Lucas. I've been doing these 20 years. I don't need you wasting your time holding the bottom of this ladder. Do I make sense? Then, get up there. It is going to be fine. Here is your paintbrush and your bucket. If this thing isn't done by the end of the weekend you and I are going to have another talk. Do I make sense?

Worker: Boss, I think with should change the ladder insurance policy. They are very old and badly placed. Next time someone will get badly hurt. My brother in law told me we should report what happened to OSHA.

Boss: With OSHA? Do you know what OSHA? It is de 'migra', the 'federales'. Do you know what they are going to do? They are going to send you back to Mexico. What do you think about that? Go and talk to OSHA.

Worker: Fernando broke his arm and next time someone could die.

Boss: You are lucky he didn't die, you were right there under the ladder with him. If you had been paying attention none of this would have happened. You know what? Why don't you just go to lunch, think about it for a little bit, and don't come back until you are ready to be part of this team. There is a lot of people that would like to have your job.

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PAUSE: You got 10 minutes to discuss possible answers. Continue when you are ready.

Worker: Is there someone who can help me? Good morning, I just arrived to this country, started a new job and I want to know if you can help me with something.

Woman: Yes, I have a couple of minutes. Let's talk in the other room.

Worker: Thanks.

Woman: It makes me so angry that they think they can intimidate people just like this. You shouldn't worry. You did exactly what someone in your position should have done. Here in WDP we work with a lot people in your same situation. I think you should file a complaint to OSHA and we can help you with it.

Worker: No, to be honest, I don't think so. My family does not have papers and we don't want anybody else to find out.

Woman: Look, a lot of people worry about that but the truth is that they are not going to ask you about your migration status. OSHA investigators only care about health and safety at work. This doesn't have to do anything with your migration status.

Worker: What can they do for me? Can they make my boss change their safety policies?

Woman: OSHA can fine the companies that violate OSHA laws and it can also investigate until they find out what is going on.

Worker: Investigation? What if they find out that I did not follow the safety procedures? What if they find out all about it?

Woman: Workers are responsible for following safety protocols and procedures. However OSHA never punishes individual workers. Seriously, this is your boss responsibility. You have complied with his rules and used the protection equipment he provided. You also informed your supervisor about hazardous conditions, told your boss when Fernando was injured and it was your boss who did not comply with his obligations. According to OSHA, your boss responsibility is to provide a work place free of hazards and to reduce the possibility of dangers to a minimum degree. Your boss needs to make sure that all of his employees are using tools and equipment safely, and that they are in good condition.

Worker: We didn't even have harnesses, and both the roofs and ladders were poorly placed.

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Woman: You can file a complaint via mail, fax or email. In Austin, WDP has presented several workers cases to OSHA, but any labor center in any city should help workers filling out this form. You just have to answer some basic questions and pay attention to the part titled 'hazard description and location', where we will register all the details.

Worker: What type of stuff is OSHA looking for?

Woman: Complaints that always result in an investigation are the ones describing a danger that is a violation to the law or in cases where an accident actually occurred, if the situation that caused the accident persists. Other cases that lead to investigation are situations where an imminent danger exists or companies that work on naturally dangerous conditions or companies with a long history of violations and investigations.

Worker: What you are describing is exactly what is going on at work right now.

Woman: Look Lucas, I really think you have a strong case and I am very proud of you for defending yourself and your coworkers and not letting the patron intimidate you.

Lucas: If feels good to know that we are not alone in this. It feels good to know that we are defending ourselves and that we are fighting for justice.

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FALLS (ALTURAS)

Jaime: It is obvious that we all know we should use special equipment against falls from heights, but did you know we should use this equipment to prevent falls starting at 6 feet?

In the year of 2007 442 people died from falls in construction work. This means that more than each day one person dies from a fall at a construction site in the U.S. Half of the 24,000 construction workers that suffered severe fall at their work sites had to miss work due to the severity of their injuries. What causes this situation? Let's meet Felix so that he tells us a little bit about it.

Jaime: Félix, What's up? How are you? Can you show us an unprotected area?

Félix: Of course Jaime, we always have to remember that unprotected floors and sites should use the guardrail system. This includes handrails, the sides of the building, and even open windows when the lower part is less than 3 feet from the base. Guardrails: They require an upper crossbeam, an intermediate crossbeam and a lower crossbeam when there is danger of falling materials. The guardrail should be supported every 8 feet and should support at least 200 pounds, that is, an adult man. It is very important to use the warning system in the absence of a guardrail system. But the warning system is more than just a couple of ropes and flags. One thing is that you can only use this system when there is small inclination angle. These lines should be visible, 3 feet from the ground and no more than 6 feet from the ceiling. It is useful if you think of the length of a human body that has tripped. The rope should support the weight of two big men, 500 pounds. Without splitting, the poles-posts should support at least 16 pounds without tipping over.

Jaime: Félix, does this show me that underneath is a hole?

Félix: Yes, if there is a dangerous hole at the construction site, there should be a fence surrounding the hole and the hole should be covered.

Make sure covers are secured prevent displacement.

Félix: There it says "hole" and it should be safe, but it is very important to talk to the supervisors, because it could support a person, but it is unlikely that it would support a vehicle.

Jaime: There are strict regulations on how to build a scaffold. Even if they are usually built in a hurry, they should be safe and leveled. If you notice that there is something wrong, do not hesitate on asking your supervisor and make sure his response makes sense.

Scaffolds 10 feet or taller require fall protection.

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Félix: Scaffolds should support 4 times the estimated load and should be fully planked, have a minimum width of 18 inches, and be free of holes, gaps, and debris.

Jaime: There should be a distance of no more than 14 inches from the work surface to the scaffold?

Félix: Yes, with greater distances we would need more guardrails. In a building with a greater height you need more guardrails for the scaffold to be safer.

Jaime: How about the support base? How can we make sure that it is completely safe?

Félix: That is a very important question. With a concrete floor you need to use plaques with the supports, you can't just put anything because you would slip and fall.

Jaime: I see. I shouldn't use bricks or ladders to reach something else. In fact, this would be very dangerous because I could fall or get injured, my equipment could even fall on someone else. Can you show us some examples?

Félix: You are right. Let's go.

Jaime: Let's go.

Jaime: Wow Félix! Look at all the safety equipment we have. We have 3 basic parts. What is this?

Félix: This is called full body harness

Jaime: How about this one?

Félix: These are the connectors.

Jaime: and this one?

Félix: These are the anchors.

Jaime: Can I try one on?

Félix: Of course Jaime.

Jaime: It fits me very well. Does it mean I am ready to work in construction?

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Félix: Remember that starting at 6 feet you must use your safety systems and more importantly, if you do not feel comfortable wearing it, ask your safety supervisor to teach you how to wear it.

Your employer must provide training on fall protection equipment.

Félix: It is very important to place the support at a distance above you to support the weight if you fall and prevent you from falling down to the ground. It is always important to verify that the fall system is one single angle, above you, in case you fall.

Jaime: Are you ready?

Félix: I am ready.

Félix: This was a direct fall. This is why it is important to place the supports above you to prevent you from falling. As I said this was a direct fall, but what happens when you fall, and swing while hanging? I am going to hold you, and you will swing so that you realize what are the dangers you would face when a worker is swinging from the roof.

Jaime: This is a swinging fall.

Félix: Exactly

Jaime: I am letting myself fall.

Félix: Yes, go on.

Jaime: it is very important that I fall directly and not in a swinging way because I can hit myself on a wall, or against overhead power lines, or even hit a coworker.

Félix: You could hit your head, become unconscious, and that would be very dangerous.

Jaime: Thanks you very much Félix. We have learned a lot from you. From now on I will feel safer while working at the heights. Now I feel like a real construction worker. I appreciate your help.

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