

Toolbox Talk

4 Common Construction Puncture Hazards

This list is not in any particular order of danger or occurrence, not necessarily the most frequently cited, or even the most injury related. These are just 4 very common hazards on a residential construction site.

Why? Because once you know the hazard, you can protect yourself and others from it.

1. Exposed Rebar Ends

Rebar is a metal rod that is used to reinforce concrete. Often it is left sticking out of one section of concrete to support another future section. Rebar is also coated with chemicals to prevent it from rusting, which make injuries prone to infection.

Vertical Rebar that is left exposed should be capped to prevent people from falling onto it. This can be done several ways:

- Steel Reinforced Caps (like little hard hats)
- A site built wooden saddle at least 2" thick
- Bend the Rebar over
- Remove the ability to work directly over the area

1926.701(b) All protruding reinforcing steel, onto and into which employees could fall, shall be guarded to eliminate the hazard of impalement.

2. Nails or Screws in debris

We've covered Housekeeping before, but it is paramount to running a safe jobsite. Leaving boards laying all over the ground while you are focused on a task is asking for trouble.

Similar to Rebar, Nails and Screws are typically coated in chemicals to protect them from the elements, but cause harsh reactions when they are inside of your body. Try to keep them out of you.

1926.25(a) During the course of construction, alteration, or repairs, form and scrap lumber with protruding nails, and all other debris, shall be kept cleared from work areas, passageways, and stairs, in and around buildings or other structures.

3. Misfired Nail Guns

37,000 injuries per year. Nail guns make rough and finish carpentry jobs a lot easier, but they are very dangerous. Finish carpentry often requires your hands to be very close to the firing end of a nailer, and even those small nails hurt a lot.

Wood can be unpredictable. Shooting a nail near the edge of a board can blow the entire end apart. Hitting a knot or another nail can send nails off course. Here are a few simple safety tips:

- Never shoot towards yourself or another person
- Keep your hands and feet at least 12" away from the nailer tip
- Check the wood for cracks, knots, nails, or other defects (and don't shot into them)
- Always wear eye protection marked Z87 or better

4. Metal Slivers from drywall screws

This doesn't have a specific standard but it is a huge pet peeve of mine. Every time I've done drywall work, when I reach into a box of screws or into my pouch I get a metal sliver. But here are a few trade secrets to help you:

- Buy better screws. They cost more but they have less shavings
- Wear gloves or rubber thimbles
- Use a magnetic tip on your screw gun instead of manually picking
- Pour a handful of screws into your hand rather than picking individually

It's no secret that construction sites are filled with dangers. We don't have to make a big deal about safety, but it is important to leave work and have a comfortable life. Working safely isn't about orange vests and long meetings, it's about not getting hurt so you can go home or whatever you do after work.