Roofing Safety Tips

Working on roofs is not everyone's cup of coffee.

First off, this calls for one to work at height, which poses its set of challenges. As if this is not enough, some roofs are sloped, making working at great heights even more precarious.

Still, people carry out different roofing projects every day and do so safely.

Roof safety is paramount whether you are attempting a DIY, working as a roofer, or own a construction company.

What Is Roof Safety?

Roof safety is a laid-out system of preventative and safety protocols to be implemented when working on rooftops. These should always be practiced while on the job to prevent structural damage and personal injuries.

Personal injuries can result from falls, electrical shock, power tools, extreme temperatures, and hazardous substances.

Roofing Safety Tips

While it might not be possible to eliminate all risks, you can minimize the chances of negative outcomes by implementing safety tips for your team.

Here are some key ones.

General Roofing Safety Tips

A good safety protocol should start before employees get on any roof. This should be an initial survey of the work area to identify potential hazards. These include power lines and unsafe roof access areas.

Once on the roof, ensure to;

- Ensure the work area is clean and well-organized
- A clean workspace allows you to see what you are doing and spot your tools quickly and easily
- Keep children and pets away as they are always a hazard on construction sites. They can tug at cords, cause spills that are slipping hazards, drop items or get hurt
- Refrain from working on a wet or slippery roof. Because working at height on a sloped roof is risky enough, you want to be on a roofing site when it's at least dry. As such, avoid working in the rain, after it has rained and after a snowstorm, until you are sure the roof is safe to be on
- Similarly, avoid working on a roof in extremely cold or hot weather. Both conditions can make it difficult for shingles to lie properly. Loose shingles are always a tripping hazard
- Always wear good quality, high tread, rubber-soled shoes for stability and traction despite the conditions. These should provide a good grip, making it harder to slip

- Use personal fall arrest systems at all times while on a roof. These include things like ropes and harnesses with a roof anchor, brackets, toe boards, and so on. Other personal protective equipment that help in keeping roofers safe include;
    - Helmets
    - Gloves
    - Eye protection gear like visors and eyeglasses
    - Hearing protection equipment like muffs and earplugs
    - Wet weather gear
    - Respiratory protection

Ladder Safety

Ladder safety tips include;

- Read all warning labels, safety precautions, and the user manual to understand its correct usage. That aside, always examine a ladder before each use to determine its condition. Never use a damaged ladder for any roof work, no matter how urgent it is
- Look for power lines overhead before handling a ladder. You should ensure there is enough clearance between the top of the ladder and the power line. Similarly, avoid using metallic ladders near power lines.
- Always have three contact points when climbing a ladder. The rule of thumb is to have two hands and one foot, or both feet and one hand in contact with the ladder. As you do this, have your weight near the center of the rungs and face the ladder as you climb. This gives you the right climbing form
- Use ladders and their accessories, like hooks, jacks, and levelers, strictly for their intended purposes only. For example;
    - Do not use a step ladder in an enclosed space or as a single ladder
    - Do not use the highest rung of a ladder as a step unless the ladder is specifically designed to allow this
- Ensure your ladder does not have anything that could cause you to slip. Check for these on the steps, rungs, and your feet as well. If you spill anything on the ladder, clean it up immediately
- Unless a ladder has been secured at the top or bottom, ensure to plant its base on a firm, level spot. This prevents displacement. Once a ladder is in place, and there is someone or equipment on it, refrain from moving it
- Ensure that a ladder extends at least three feet above the point of support once positioned. This could be the eave or the gutter. Do not stand or place equipment on any part of the ladder lying above its point of support
- To get the safest working angle, place the ladder at a quarter of the ladder's working length away from the wall or the vertical surface it’s leaning against. For example, if the eaves of your roof are 10 feet high, place the base of your ladder 2.5 feet away from the eave. This offers maximum stability

- As you work on a ladder, get as close as possible to your target area. Always ensure you do not stretch or reach further than arm's length while standing on a ladder. This can shift your weight enough to destabilize the ladder and cause a fall

Electrical Safety

Electricity is very central to construction. Unfortunately, workers in the construction industry are at high risk from electrical hazards. Because roofers work on rooftops and near power lines, their exposure to electrical hazards is heightened.

Aside from power lines, roofers are also exposed to building wiring, extension cords, powered welders, and hand tools. All these increase the potential for fires, burns, and electric shocks.

Seeing as the electrical risks of working on a roof cannot be eliminated entirely, here are some precautions to ensure your safety;

- If the power lines are too low and there is no way to avoid contact with them, call your utility company before beginning a project. Having them temporarily shut off the line might be a better option than taking the risk
- Electricity has the power to arc to a metallic object as far as a few feet away. As such, do not use a metallic ladder near power lines. The ideal clearance is 10 feet. If a power line lies lower than this, opt for fiberglass or wood ladders. Be cautious when using metal flashing as well
- Never touch hot wires with your tools or your hands
- Use ground-fault circuit interrupters to de-energize circuits
- Learn the allowable loads and avoid overloading outlets
- Ensure all your equipment is double-insulated or properly grounded
- Disconnect all power tools before repairing or servicing
- Ensure all cords are exposed. Do not cover them with rugs or mats. Visibility helps with safety

That said, voltages even as low as 50 milliamps have the potential to injure a worker-even fatally. Always inform workers of any potential electrocution risks through on-site signage and project safety meetings.

Nail Gun Safety

Pneumatic nail guns can become dangerous when mishandled. Therefore, anyone that uses it is advised to read the manual that comes with it to understand the dos and don'ts.

It should also only be used by qualified professionals.

Some of the key things to have in mind include:

- Always point the nail gun at what you are working on or the floor; never at another person

- Always check if a nail gun's safety mechanism is working properly before you begin to use it
- Avoid 'shooting' a nail gun at anything. Instead, press its tip firmly on the material you want to fasten before pulling the trigger
- Ensure the gun is cleaned properly, regularly inspected and that it's well lubricated before each use
- Nail guns can misfire; avoid resting it on or against any part of your body
- Always disconnect a nail gun's air supply as soon as you are done using it

Roofing Safety When Handling Materials

Aside from the height and environment roofers work in, roofing materials can also pose some hazards.

These tips should help with injury prevention when handling roofing materials.

- There are a lot of materials involved in roofing projects. As such, you might be tempted to carry too many materials at a go to get things moving a bit faster. This is ill-advised, especially when climbing stairs, climbing ladders, and walking across steep rooftops. Carry small loads at a time and ensure you can maneuver and see your way ahead
- Whenever possible. Try and designate a material storage area on the roof to make retrieval easier
- Practice proper lifting form to protect your back. Follow the steps below to lift properly;
    Keep a wide base of support, where your feet are at shoulder-width apart, with one foot slightly in front of the other
    Squat down by bending at the knees and hips
    Ensure you hold good posture by looking straight ahead, keeping your back straight, shoulders back, and chest out. This helps hold your upper back straight while maintaining a slight arch in your back
    Lift the load by straightening your hips and knees (not the back). Be keen to keep your back straight and not twist it at any point
- Familiarize yourself with manufacturers; instructions for all products and materials you use for roofing

Other Considerations

Rain and snow are the most commonly discussed weather conditions for roof safety. However, working in extreme heat can pose its own dangers.

Roofs are very effective at trapping heat. Dark roofs will absorb and radiate heat back towards workers in hot summer months. This can cause heat exhaustion. Employers should therefore install a shade for workers to work under. If this is not possible, roofers need to take regular breaks and get away from the sun.

The other helpful thing to do is to stay hydrated. The best way to hydrate is by taking regular sips of water throughout the day instead of drinking an entire bottle at once.

Roofers should have a water dispenser close by or be encouraged to bring bottled water to work.

Refrain from getting on the roof when on medications that might cause drowsiness, when feeling unwell or intoxicated. Workers should be encouraged to speak up when they have an off day and don't feel physically able to work at heights.

Organizations should also make roof safety training a regular occurrence at the office.

Importance of Roof Safety

Roofing safety is important for many reasons.

Roofs are dangerous to work on, and roofers can take fatal falls or get seriously injured, maimed, or paralyzed from roofing accidents. Therefore, the main importance of roof safety is ensuring all roof workers are protected and remain safe.

Another reason to follow roof safety is compliance.

All countries have a worker's safety body that outlines the things employers need to do to provide a safe workspace for workers. Non-compliance can lead to heavy penalties, fines, and even jail time.

It can also be extremely injurious to your brand, which will cost you money in the long term. When you think about it, the costs of non-compliance are significantly higher than those of complying.

There is another reason as well. Customers today go beyond services and products and want to align themselves with companies they have shared belief systems and companies that are socially responsible.

As an employer, it's good to be known as a company that cares about employee welfare. Implementing safety regulations, initiating safety training, and so on are ways of proving this. While this should not be the only reason you take safety seriously, it's as good a reason as any other.

Lastly, being keen on roofing safety tips keeps workers happier at work and more productive. Once it becomes second nature, you will likely experience fewer roofing accidents.

This means fewer sick days off and, in turn, better productivity.

Conclusion

Working on roofs is hazardous to roofers. However, taking some safety precautions can minimize these hazards and ensure they complete different projects safely.

As employers, the time taken to train and incentivize your employees to follow safety precautions is well worth your time.