

NAWIC

The National Association of
Women in Construction



Safety & Health Awareness Committee

December 2021

Holiday Safety Concerns in the Workplace

As the winter holidays approach, employees tend to be more distracted than usual. From a health and safety perspective, it is worth considering how these issues affect workers in the office, on the jobsite, and in their personal lives.

- **Fatigue:** People are more likely to be fatigued during the holiday season due to extra tasks and responsibilities. As a result, fatigue can pose a risk regardless of whether or not employees are engaging in high-risk work. Injuries in the workplace occur most often when they are not expected and are more likely to happen when employees are tired or run down. So, although fatigue is a complex issue that lacks a single easy solution, it might be a good idea to consider longer breaks or alter work schedules to help compensate for seasonal fatigue.
- **Rushing and frustration:** In addition to holiday stress in employees' personal lives, the construction industry often faces its busiest times leading up to the end of the year. The added pressure in the workplace and on the jobsite can affect employees' emotional state, causing them to rush. These states may cause employees to unintentionally create hazards or miss something vital. When rushing, workers are more likely to slip, trip, or fall. It should also be noted that some companies fail to live up to the "safety first" slogan during the holidays. It is important for management to make it clear to employees—through actions as much as words—that their safety is more important than rushing through a job.
- **Ladder safety:** Taken by the holiday spirit, employees may use ladders to decorate the workplace. With ladders being used more frequently around the holidays, it is important to provide a refresher on ladder safety. For example, people should ensure the ladder's stability before use, keep three points of contact at all times and never place a ladder on a surface other than the ground.



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- **Electrical safety:** Many electrical incidents happen over the holidays. These incidents are often caused by carelessness and misuse of decorations. Ensure that any decorative lights have been tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory, are undamaged and do not overload the sockets. Employees should also be reminded about the importance of unplugging decorations for the night and never using electric lights on a metallic tree.



- **Slips, trips and falls:** If corridors and rooms are free of decorations and cables throughout the year, people are likely to become complacent and fail to notice when suddenly there is something in their way. Holiday lights and decorations should be clearly visible and kept out of the way to prevent tripping. There are many other ways for people to slip and fall during the holidays as well. Snow, ice, and rain are the main culprits, especially because they are coupled with shorter, darker days that make it easier for people to miss or misjudge a step when walking outdoors. Snow and ice should be removed promptly from areas where people will be walking. Safety managers should also consider providing new or additional mats to stop snow and water from being brought inside working areas.
- **Food safety:** Nobody wants to see employees get sick before the holidays. However, some workplaces do not take adequate precautions when ordering and storing party platters for their staff holiday gatherings. Food handling guidelines must be followed whenever food is being prepared, stored, and distributed. Be extra mindful of food-related allergies and make sure that anything with allergens is labeled appropriately and kept separately from other foods. If employees are contributing to potlucks or baking for their colleagues, remind them of the need to communicate the use of common food allergens.
- **Drunk and drowsy driving:** Work and family gatherings are often an opportunity for people to have a few drinks—but it is imperative that nobody is allowed to get behind the wheel after consuming alcohol. No employer wants their workers involved in a car crash. When organizing an event where alcohol is served, it is a good idea to pay for workers' cabs, Ubers, Lyfts, or other forms of paid transportation. There are also various charities and companies that drive people home in their own cars, thus preventing unnecessary worries and logistical problems concerning vehicles being left somewhere overnight. To reiterate the problems of fatigue above, you should treat drowsy driving with the same level of conviction as drunk driving because it is also risky, and most people are so complacent with driving tired that they do not even give it a second thought. And the combination of a late night and a couple of drinks compounds the risk to disastrous levels.

The holidays are a wonderful time to reconnect with friends and family. Being mindful of risks and hazards during the holidays will allow you to create memories this holiday that you will cherish for years to come.