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INCIDENT ALERT

Two carpenters were tasked with dismantling a walking bridge that had been constructed across an excavation. The excavation had been filled, making the bridge unnecessary. It had been constructed using aluminum beams that were approximately 26 feet in length. The workers had dismantled the bridge and were in the process of carrying the beams to a storage area.

They had developed a work plan and it included carrying the beams on their shoulders. As they were transporting one beam, the worker at the back end tripped on some adjacent material and dropped his end. The beam twisted and struck the worker in front in the head. He later saw a physician who prescribed pain medication.

LESSONS LEARNED

During a review of the incident it was discovered that several factors were significant contributors to this injury. First, the walk path the workers were using had not been cleared of all obstructions. In this case it was additional material from the bridge they had demolished. Second, one worker was carrying the beam on his left shoulder while the other was carrying it on his right. When the beam was dropped it pivoted on the worker’s shoulder, forcing it into the back of his head. Had the beam been carried on the same shoulder it would have been more likely to roll off unfettered. Third, better communication between the workers could have helped. Letting your co-worker know when you are lifting or if you are having difficulty can prevent many injuries. Each of these issues should be taken into consideration during the foreman and crew level task planning effort.

Another thought surrounds the practice of carrying loads on workers shoulders. When you do this it places additional strain on other parts of your body, specifically your neck, shoulder, and lower back. Different methods of transporting materials should be explored during the planning process. Exploring the availability and practicality of material handling devices certainly could eliminate this type of injury. If material must be hand carried, positioning it at waist level it greatly reduces the amount of stress placed on shoulders and the lower back area.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Talk with your contractor about material handling issues, and their expectations surrounding the task planning effort. Keep in mind that the majority of injuries suffered during construction activities occur while handling and moving materials, tools, and equipment.

2. Watch for tasks that may result in similar injuries during your walk through. Are people carrying materials on their shoulders? Are their walk paths clear of tripping hazards? Are
they using material handling devices such as rolling carts, pallet jacks, etc.? Could the loss of control of materials result in an injury, either to the worker or others nearby?

3. Share this Incident Alert with your contractor and ask them to share it with their workers.

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