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INCIDENT ALERT

Two pipe fitters were tasked with installing overhead pipe. The pipe was being placed in a trapeze type hangar system beside several other piping runs. During the planning process they had decided it would be best to use 8 foot step ladders, climb the ladders with one person lifting the end overhead while the other pushed the end of the pipe into the hangar. As one pipe fitter was lifting the end of a 14 foot section of pipe into position it slipped from his grasp. He reached out and grabbed it as it fell and his elbow struck the top plate of the ladder he was on. His arm was bent backward resulting in a torn bicep muscle. He was taken to a medical facility where he was placed on restricted duty. He later received surgery to repair the muscle, which resulted in his inability to work for several days.

LESSONS LEARNED

During the investigation it was noted that the pipe hangar they were working with at the time of the injury was in a tightly restricted area approximately 10 feet off the floor. The team had been engaged in the installation activity for some time and had initially developed a written plan, but had not updated it to take the specific work area and hazards associated with the task that day into account. There were other pipes sharing the trapeze hangar and the potential existed to knock the pipe against the others and dislodge it (due to the time lag between the incident and the investigation interview, the injured worker could not recall if he had actually bumped the end of the pipe). The pipe fitter was holding the pipe in his left hand while climbing the ladder, which affected his balance on the ladder and his ability to control the pipe. When the pipe dropped the worker reacted to grab it and did not allow it to drop to the ground. He stated his concern was the potential for his partner to loose control of his end of the pipe and be injured.

Four changes in activity were instituted by the contractor as a result of the injury:

1. A material lift designed for positioning pipe was brought to the site, and the workers trained in it’s use and coached to use the lift when possible

2. The area around the activity will be controlled with red barricade tape while lifting is taking place

3. When the use of the lift is infeasible, an additional person will be assigned to the crew exclusively to assist in handing the pipe up to the worker on the ladder and in controlling the pipe while it is being lifted

4. Additional emphasis will be placed on appropriate task planning efforts, with a focus on the daily task and “what is different today” that could result in an injury

Construction can be dangerous. Many of readily recognize “high hazard” activities, such as steel erection, working at height, heavy crane lifts, and the plethora of other non-routine
activities that require detailed planning to accomplish the task safely. This has no doubt contributed to the continuing reduction in injury and fatality rates in our industry nationwide. As an industry, we need to adapt our thinking to recognize that routine daily tasks have controllable hazards as well. The majority of injuries in construction are the result of material handling activities. Understanding this leads us to conclude that if material handling devices (such as lifts, chain falls, etc.) are used we can eliminate a significant number of these injuries. In this case the use of a lift or chain fall had been considered but was rejected due to the congested pipe hangar and other obstructions in the area.

**ACTION ITEMS**

1. Ask your contractor about how they manage job hazard analysis and task planning for common daily tasks. Ask how workers are included in the task planning and job hazard analysis process. Encourage your contractors to help train their employees in identifying common hazards associated with daily tasks.

2. Watch for tasks that may result in similar injuries during your walk through. Are workers carrying material up ladders? Is the area below overhead work properly controlled? Are workers using material handling equipment? Are better, safer, methods for material handling available? Have workers addressed material handling hazards during the task planning process?

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

Distribution:
All CPO Staff