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INCIDENT ALERT

A laborer foreman was in the process of organizing his workers for the morning tasks. He was informed that there would be a need for some grout patching to take place later in the day. The patching was intended to seal concrete around a steam pipe installed for the new building he was working on. The installation had been coordinated with a local municipality. As the foreman continued to coordinate his workers, someone informed him that city workers were standing by to complete their portion of the work and the need to install the grout was urgent. The foreman hurriedly gathered his tools and materials then proceeded with the work.

The task was inside a shallow excavation and required he be placed in awkward positions. At one point he was straddling the new steam line and reaching around to place the grout. In this position he was kneeling on a board with his right knee for an extended period of time. When he completed the task he noticed he knee was quite sore. He shrugged off the discomfort and continued to work. The next morning his knee was quite swollen and he made an appointment to see his physician, who diagnosed him with a torn bursa sac and staph infection. The physician drained the infection and prescribed antibiotics, then released him to return to work.

LESSONS LEARNED

First, the work was perceived to have a sense of urgency. The worker knew that city employees were waiting on the work to be completed and so he was in a hurry to get it done. As such, no job hazard analysis or task plan were developed. Planning would have allowed the worker to better assess the working conditions in the trench. He could have been better prepared (i.e., with a pair of knee pads) and may have seen a way to minimize his need to work in awkward positions. Given the time, excavating the area a little more may have helped. A good task specific planning effort, focused on the unique aspects of this task, may have prevented the injury. Second, the work occurred on the day before a long holiday weekend. As such, the injury was not recognized on a work day and therefore not reported to his supervision immediately. Earlier diagnosis and treatment may have prevented the infection thereby eliminating the need for surgical procedure.

Change is constant in construction. Construction itself is the process of change. How we manage the daily changes and how we include the appropriate level of planning directly affects our safety.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Talk with your contractor about their expectations for task planning. Talk with them about how they emphasize the need for task planning for ALL work activities, even those perceived to be emergencies. Ask how they emphasize the need to inspect the work area for hazards during the plan development.
2. Watch for activities that may result in similar injuries during your walkthrough. Are workers on their knees performing tasks? Is it necessary for them to work in this position, or could the work be moved to a better, safer, more ergonomically correct location? Are workers wearing the appropriate PPE, such as knee pads?

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

Distribution:
All CPO Staff