Prepared by Ron Fouty
Date Issued: March 2, 2010

INCIDENT ALERT

Two drywall installers were in the process of installing 12 foot sheets of 5/8” drywall. They were working at a level approximately 7 feet above floor height. In order to access the area, they were using a portable work platform/step ladder system (walk-up bench) that was approximately four feet tall. The work technique they were using was to place two of the ladders adjacent to and facing the wall, lift the drywall and carry it up the steps on the bench, then secure the drywall to metal studs using a screw gun. The section they were installing was approximately 24 inches wide and weighed approximately 50 pounds. As they were walking up the ladders, one of the workers twisted and strained his lower back. He was taken to a medical facility where he was examined and released to return to light duty. His pain continued and he went to another doctor who advised him not to return to work for the remainder of the week.

LESSONS LEARNED

Several issues were discussed during the incident investigation. First, the workers were walking up the benches while carrying material in both hands. This does not allow a person to retain balance, and certainly does not allow them to maintain 3 points of contact while ascending the steps. Second, long sheets of drywall are awkward. Though two workers were carrying the load in order to safely perform this activity it is essential for workers to continually communicate and be very clear about the steps involved. No written task plan was available and apparently had not been prepared.

The work process was modified after the injury. The benches were turned so they were closer to the wall. The workers were instructed to carry the load to the benches, set the load on the top working surface, climb up, then lift the load into position and secure it to the wall.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Talk with your contractor about the proper use of ladders and scaffolds on your project. Ask them how they will manage the material handling aspects of drywall installation.

2. Watch for ladder/walk up bench use when performing your job walks. Are people carrying material up or down a ladder? Are they maintaining three points of contact with the ladder at all times? Are workers attempting to move heavy or awkward loads? If so, are there material handling devices that can be used? If more than one person is involved, are they maintaining good communication? Have the workers completed a task plan, and is the plan appropriate for the task being performed?

3. Share and discuss this incident alert widely.

Distribution:
All CPO Staff