

Taking EH&S Into Consideration During Renovation Work

Every year we see renovation projects go into tailspins, at least temporarily, because of unplanned environmental health & safety (EH&S) issues. Usually these “surprise issues” translate at the least into delayed schedules, confusion, cost overruns, and premiums for expediting work. Even more serious consequences can include worker or public injury, exposure to toxic chemicals, and various legal liabilities. The good news is that there have been more and more owners, A/E firms, and construction managers this year including EH&S planning in their overall project design and planning.

Many in the construction industry are now aware of some of the more common culprits, such as asbestos-containing building material (ACBM). The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, along with many of the states require inspections by accredited personnel for ACBM in public and private buildings prior to renovation or demolition. If ACBM is identified and is to be disturbed by the work, it must be properly abated by qualified firms. Lead-based paint is also present in many buildings construction prior to 1978. Improper handling of the lead can result in workers with elevated blood lead levels and contaminated dust in and around the work areas. Lead and asbestos are regulated by various state and federal agencies and in both cases, adequate inspections during the planning phase will allow time to fully consider all options.

Another hazard that is currently an OSHA-emphasis program is silica. Silica is abundant in our natural environment and crystalline silica is found in materials such as concrete, masonry, rock and other similar materials. When they are made into a fine dust (for example, blasting using silica sand, concrete work, hammering and drilling rock, chipping masonry and block, demolition, etc.) and suspended in air, the fine particles can be breathed in causing lung damage, cancer, and increase the risk of other diseases.

A few other common renovation-related EH&S issues to consider include:

- Indoor Air Quality
- Fall Safety and Scaffolding
- Hazard Communications
- Electrical, Lock out Tag out
- Confined Space Entry
- Trenching and Shoring
- PCBs (light ballast) and Mercury (fluorescent light bulbs and switches)
- Slips and Trips – Housekeeping
- Welding and Cutting

This is just a summary of some key EH&S issues. All of these potential hazards and concerns are most easily and most efficiently handled proactively. A good place to start is to become familiar with the OSHA construction safety standards if you aren't already. Often times it may make sense to be sure an EH&S expert is on the project design team. Don't forget that OSHA places the onus for regulatory compliance on owners, contractors and subcontractors and an OSHA-

competent person must be provided at the job site. These considerations will be well worth it for you, your employees and your customers.

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