Flu Season

Flu season typically begins as early as October in the US and can sometimes last until May. Unfortunately, it's not possible to predict the start, length, or severity of the flu season each year. But each fall, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reminds us that the flu is a serious disease that can cause illness, hospitalizations, and deaths.

The CDC recommends that everyone (except infants under 6 months) gets vaccinated for the flu. In addition to getting the flu shot, here are everyday actions you can take that will greatly reduce your chances of catching the flu:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Limit contact with others as much as possible while you or anyone in your family is sick.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. We spread germs and we pick them up when we touch our faces and then touch doorknobs, tools, handrails, phones, etc.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with flu germs.

If you are sick with the flu, or think that you might be, you'll have to decide whether or not to call in sick. At some workplaces, people can be pretty sick and get through the day in their cubicles without infecting others or putting them in danger. But on the jobsite, things are different. Our work is strenuous, it takes place in all types of weather, it involves many serious hazards, and you usually don't have a "light duty" option to help you rest for a day or so until you feel better. It's important to know when to stay home so that your illness doesn't create health or safety hazards on our jobsite.

Consider your symptoms. If you have a fever, especially if it's accompanied by weakness, fatigue, body aches, diarrhea, or vomiting, you should stay home.

Medications for flu symptoms have side effects that can be dangerous. If the flu medicine you're taking, whether it's prescription or over-the-counter, makes your mind foggy, or makes you feel sleepy, dizzy, or confused, it's a good idea to stay home. Pay attention to warnings on medication, especially warnings that say you should not operate heavy machinery or drive a vehicle.

Be a team player. Between 5% and 20% of the US population will get the flu this year, so there's a good chance that one of us will get it. If we all gripe when someone calls off, then people are more likely to come in when they're really too sick, and we will all end up catching the flu. You don't have to like taking up the slack when somebody's out, but you don't have to be cranky about it either. Respect and a little moral support will make flu season easier for us all.

SAFETY REMINDER

Get a flu vaccination from your doctor or pharmacist.

NOTES:

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ATTENDEES:

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Prevent Jobsite Fires

This week is National Fire Prevention Week, so this is a good time for construction workers like us to think about how we can prevent jobsite fires. Today we will focus our attention on the three elements of the fire triangle, and common ignition sources on and around the jobsite.

You might be familiar with the fire triangle. Triangles must have three sides; take away one side and you don't have a triangle anymore. Fire is a chemical reaction that requires three elements. Just like a triangle, if you take away one element, you don't have a fire anymore. **The three elements needed to have fire are:**

- **Fuel**—a combustible material
- **Heat**—to raise the temperature of the fuel high enough for it to burn
- **Oxygen**—to combine chemically with the fuel to create more heat and sustain the fire

If one element of the fire triangle is not present, there cannot be a fire. If there is a fire and one element is removed, the fire will go out. You can prevent fires by controlling the heat that's needed to start a fire. Specifically, let's think about controlling ignition sources because they provide the initial heat that's needed to start (or ignite) a fire.

Here are some common examples of ignition sources:

- Open flames.
- Extension cords that are in use but still coiled.
- Sparks from welding, cutting, soldering, grinding, a saw blade that hits a nail, or a hammer or nail that strikes a concrete or masonry surface.
- Arcs from static electricity, opening a breaker, unplugging a cord, or from the brushes in electric motors (including the motors in power tools).
- Hot surfaces such as boilers, furnaces, steam pipes, electric lamps, hot plates, hot ducts and flues, electric coils, and hot bearings.
- Overloaded electrical circuits.
- Smoking, lighters, and dropped cigarettes.

Look around the jobsite and your work area; there are plenty of ignition sources. **Eliminate** the ignition sources you can: Don't smoke on the jobsite, or at least not near combustibles or flammables. Don't cut, weld, or grind where combustibles are present. Always uncoil cords before plugging them in. Use ground straps to eliminate static electricity. **Control** the ignition sources that you can't eliminate: Guard hot surfaces and open flames, and keep all combustible materials away. If you have to weld near combustibles, keep sparks away by covering combustible material with fire blankets.

To paraphrase Smokey Bear, "Only you can prevent fires."

SAFETY REMINDER

There are far more fire-related deaths at home than at work. Take fire prevention home with you!

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Using and Caring for Tools

Tools make the job easier. Remember that their safe operation literally rests in your hands, so you must stay focused and avoid distractions. Know the basics: 1) how to use tools properly, and 2) how to take good care of them.

Follow these safe work practices when using tools:

- Use the right tool for the job. Using the wrong tool, or making do with a tool that is handy, may cause an accident or injury.
- Inspect every tool for damage before you use it.
- Check blades and grinding wheels for cracks.
- Remove damaged or malfunctioning tools from service immediately.
- Follow the manufacturer's operating instructions for all tools. That means you'll have to read them.
- Do not alter or modify tools, safety switches, or guards. Use tools as they were designed.
- Wear all the necessary PPE when using tools; plan on eye and ear protection at a minimum.
- Never remove guards while you're using a tool; the guards are there to protect you.
- Keep cutting tools sharp. Dull tools are generally more dangerous than sharp ones because they require more force to make them cut.
- Disconnect power tools before servicing them —unplug, disconnect air lines, remove batteries.
- Don't carry tools by their hoses or power cords.
- Never yank the tool's cord to disconnect it from a power source.
- Replace frayed or damaged extension cords.
- Check air hoses for cuts, abrasions, cracks, or other signs of wear or damage.
- Use a tool belt; don't carry sharp tools in your pockets.

Clean your tool belt and toolbox every once in a while—today might be the time. Take out the tools, bits, fasteners, etc., and then clean out the gunk and mess. Your load will be lighter and you'll be less likely to hurt a hand when you reach for a tool.

Clean and maintain tools according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Don't leave tools lying on the ground or exposed to the elements. Clean muddy, greasy, or dirty tools right away. Wipe down wet tools with a bit of light oil to prevent rust. Sharpen or replace dull blades. Dress up mushroomed heads. Adjust guides to proper positions.

Tools that are damaged or worn out are dangerous—to you and to anyone working nearby. Taking good care of the tools you use will help prevent accidents and injuries; make your work easier; and let you be more comfortable and more efficient.

SAFETY REMINDER

Never leave a powder-actuated tool unattended.

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What Do All the Colors Mean?

Signs are used to communicate important, sometimes life-saving, information to you. The words on those signs have specific meanings, and so do the colors. In order to understand exactly what a sign is telling you, you have to be able to read and understand the words. On some signs, we use specific colors to communicate the magnitude of the hazard instantly, so you can start to protect yourself even before you've finished reading all of the words. Today we're going to talk about the meanings of standard sign colors.

Red means "Danger," "Stop," "Emergency," and "Flammable." It is used where there is imminent and immediate risk of serious injury or death. It is also used on emergency controls and for fire alarms, fire exits, and fire-fighting equipment. When you see red, you should stop and think carefully.

Orange means "Warning," and is used where there is a risk of serious injuries like falling objects, amputations, and falls. Orange means you should pay close attention and think carefully—there is a real and significant risk nearby.

Yellow means "Caution." This color is used to signal specific physical hazards including falls, tripping, impact, and collision hazards. The risk is real, but the likelihood and severity are lower than when red and orange are used.

Green means "Safety" and indicates the location of first-aid equipment and safety equipment. It is also used for safety instructions and general safety information.

Blue is used for information signs and bulletin boards that are not immediately safety related.

Magenta or **Purple on Yellow** means "Radiation Caution."

Fluorescent Orange and **Orange-Red** indicate a biohazard.

Colors can have different meanings depending on where and how they are used. For instance, the colors we just discussed are also used for marking underground utilities. Here are their meanings when they are used for excavations:

- **Red** is used to mark electrical power lines, cables, conduit, and lighting cables.
- **Yellow** identifies gas, oil, steam, petroleum, and gaseous materials.
- **Orange** identifies communication, alarm, signal lines, cables, and conduits.
- **Blue** is for potable water.
- **Purple** is for reclaimed water and irrigation and slurry lines.
- **Green** is used to mark sewer and drain lines.
- **White** is used to mark a proposed excavation.
- **Pink** is used for temporary survey markings.

Signs are posted for important reasons. They provide information that you need to know in order to be safe. Pay attention to the colors and the words on every sign you pass, even if you've seen it a thousand times.

SAFETY REMINDER

Remember that red means "stop." If you're so upset that you're "seeing red," you need to stop and calm down.

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