October 2025

- 10-06-2025 - TBT - Safe Exit Routes
- 10-13-2025 - TBT - Fires in Structures Under Construction
- 10-20-2025 - TBT - Electrical Tape to Repair Cords
- 10-27-2025 - TBT - Dealing with Hazards Created by Water Inside Excavations

10-06-2025 - TBT - Safe Exit Routes

Toolbox Talk: Emergency Preparation – Maintaining Safe Exit Routes [Reference 1910.36, 1910.37 & 1926.34]

Should a fire or some other emergency can occur that requires us to evacuate our work areas and leave the building, it is of upmost importance that we are able to do so quickly and safely. So today we will discuss a few unsafe conditions that we need to watch every day. Because these hazards, if allowed to exist, can be the difference between a quick escape and disaster!

- Make certain that designated emergency exit doors always remain unlocked from the inside while the building or structure is occupied;

- Report any doors or hardware, like doorknobs or jambs, that are broken or malfunctioning so they can be repaired or replaced;

- Never place or store any equipment, materials, or other obstructions in front of an exit door, nor within any aisle or other pathway designated for escape during an emergency;

- Keep equipment and materials away from the outside of emergency exit doors too. Blocking an exit door or path from the outside can prevent people from being able to get out of, and away from, the building during an emergency;

- Do not place curtains, signs, decorations, or similar obstructions over emergency exit doors or across designated emergency aisle-ways, as these items can make exits difficult to locate during an emergency;

- Report any lit emergency exit signs and emergency lighting fixtures that are not working or appear to be broken, so they can be repaired or replaced;

- Avoid placing containers of flammable liquids or other highly combustible materials under or alongside stairways, ramps, and other pathways used for emergency egress;

- Let your supervisor know about any doors along the path to an exit that you feel could be easily mistaken for an emergency exit. They may need to be marked with a sign stating their intended purpose (like “Closet”), or marked “Not an Exit”;

- Finally; if for some reason you do not know where the designated emergency aisles and exits are for your work area, please let your supervisor know right away.

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10-13-2025 - TBT - Fires in Structures Under Construction

10-13-2025 - TBT - Fires in Structures Under Construction

From 2017 to 2021, local fire departments responded to an estimated average of 4,440 fires in structures under construction per year. These fires caused an annual average of five civilian deaths, 59 civilian injuries, and $370 million in direct property damage. Only 1 percent of all the reported structure fires were in structures under construction, but these fires accounted for 3 percent of the direct property damage in structure fires.

- The estimated number of fires in structures under construction has increased since 2014 after declining between 2006 and 2010.
- Three of every four fires (76 percent) in structures under construction involved residential properties.
- Cooking equipment was the leading cause of fires on construction sites, but these fires tended to be minor.
- Fires that were intentionally set caused fewer than one in 10 fires (8 percent) but 45 percent of the direct property damage.
- Fires in structures under construction were highest in January and lowest in October.
- Fires in structures under construction were most common in the afternoon and evening; however, fires that occurred between midnight and 6 a.m. accounted for just over half (51 percent) of the direct property damage.
- The leading factors contributing to the ignition of fires in structures under construction included heat sources that were too close to combustible materials, abandoned or discarded materials or products, and electrical failures or malfunctions.

The most common causes of under construction fires in the most recent five-year period, as well as historically, are electrical distribution and lighting equipment; heating equipment; cooking equipment; a torch, burner, or soldering iron; or an intentional cause. For each of these causes, there are safety protocols that can be utilized to reduce the risk of fire.

The safety protocols can include the following:

- Ensure that the temporary electrical service lighting follows the installation requirements set forth in NFPA 70®, *National Electrical Code*®; electrical equipment is maintained and regularly inspected; use of extension wiring is kept to a minimum; and machinery and equipment do not overload available circuits.
- Prohibit the use of temporary cooking equipment (such as hot plates or grills) or the use of improvised heating devices for warming food at the construction site.

- Ensure that unauthorized temporary heaters are restricted from the worksite and that the heaters permitted on the worksite are placed at safe distances from combustible and flammable materials; are used in conformity with their listing and manufacturer instructions; and are regularly checked to ensure that they are being safely operated and do not constitute a hazard (such as being overturned).
- Require a permit system for hot work activities and enforce a thirty-minute (or longer) cool-down interval after torches, burners, or soldering irons have been used.
- Reduce the risk of arson by safeguarding construction sites with fencing or other controls; these controls can include lighting or after-hours security personnel, as needed.
- Have an approved fire prevention program (also known as a fire safety plan) for the construction site.
- Ensure there is a fire prevention program manager to administer the fire safety plan to completion.

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10-20-2025 - TBT - Electrical Tape to Repair Cords

10-20-2025 - Toolbox Talk: Basic Electrical Safety – Don’t Use Electrical Tape to Repair / Splice Cords

It seems logical that a roll of electrical tape could be used to safely repair a frayed or damaged flexible electrical cord, or to splice two pieces of a flexible electrical cord together; I mean it’s called electrical tape, right? However, Federal OSHA electrical safety standards do not allow us to make a repair to a frayed or damaged electrical cord using electrical tape, nor can we use electrical tape to splice two cords together. Here is an overview of OSHA’s reasoning for not using electrical tape to make repairs or splices of electrical cords.

Can I Use Electrical Tape to Repair an Electrical Cord That Has a Deep Nick or Break in the Outer Jacket?

Repair or replacement of a flexible electrical cord is required when the outer jacket is deeply penetrated enough to cause that part of the cord to bend more than the undamaged part, or when the jacket is penetrated completely. Repair or replacement of the cord is also required when its conductor wires or their insulation inside are damaged. But there is one provision in the OSHA electrical standards which disallows the use of electrical tape to make the repair of the jacket of a worn or frayed flexible cord.

That is because OSHA electrical standards require that flexible electrical cords be “approved”, and the original approval of electrical cords is based on the types of materials and construction used by the manufacturer of each cord. If we were to wrap an electrical cord with electrical tape, it could significantly change the flexibility characteristics of the cord, which in turn can affect the amount of stress in the areas adjacent to the tape; this is particularly a concern with respect to the proper function of the grounding wire. Also, the cord’s outer jacket is designed both to prevent damage to the conductors and insulators inside, and to further insulate the conductors. Taped repairs of the jacket usually will not duplicate the cord's original characteristics; in most cases neither the jacket's strength nor flexibility characteristics will be restored. Therefore, tape repairs of the jacket may not be used to repair a worn or frayed cord.

Can I Use Electrical Tape to Splice a Flexible Electrical Cord?

OSHA standards state that flexible cords made up with wires smaller than 12-gauge shall be used only in continuous lengths without splice or tap. A hard service flexible cord that is fabricated from 12-gauge wire or larger may be spliced, but only if the splice retains the insulation, outer sheath properties, and usage characteristics of the cord being spliced. Therefore, taped splices of

electrical cords should not be made because they usually will not duplicate the cord's original characteristics; in most cases neither the jacket's strength nor flexibility characteristics will be restored. There are approved splice kits available that a qualified electrician could use to splice a cord should a splice ever be necessary.

So long story made short, we should not be repairing electrical cords that have a deep nick or broken jacket by wrapping them with electrical tape, nor should we be using electrical tape to wrap spliced electrical cords. Instead, turn damaged cords in to your supervisor, or your safety manager so they can be repaired or spliced using proper methods, or replaced if necessary.

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10-27-2025 - TBT - Dealing with Hazards Created by Water Inside Excavations

10-27-2025 TBT: Dealing with Hazards Created by Water Inside Excavations [Reference 1926 Subpart P]

Water is one of the world's most precious resources; in fact, we couldn't live without it. But water inside of an excavation creates a whole range of potential hazards that can make our work much more dangerous – even deadly! For example, when water is allowed to saturate the soil, it fills up the microscopic void spaces that are present between all the small particles of dirt. While that may not seem like a big deal, these spaces between particles can make up as much as 30 percent of the volume of the soil. Just one gallon of water weighs over 8.3 pounds. That is a lot of extra weight created when water saturates the soil; weight which gravity uses to help bring down the sides of an excavation quicker than it otherwise would. In addition, the water acts a lubricant, loosening the bond between the soil particles, which can eventually lead to the development of dangerous cracks and fissures in the soil.

Another problem created by water inside an excavation is the potential for erosion if the water is allowed to run along the bottom of an excavation. The erosion can undermine the soil along the sides of the excavation, leading to the soil mass making up the walls above to cave into the excavation. In addition, water that is allowed to remain inside an excavation for an extended period can soak in and soften the soil at the bottom of an excavation. This results in the creation of a soft zone of soil along the bottom of the walls that can compress more easily and cause the soil mass above to collapse. And finally, water that is deep enough could possibly create a drowning hazard inside of an excavation. This is especially true if there happened to be a sudden large discharge of water into an excavation, such as might occur with a broken water main or similar situation.

What steps can we take to help protect ourselves and others? First, NEVER enter an excavation where water has accumulated or is accumulating until the situation has been evaluated by the Competent Person. It is the Competent Person's responsibility to prescribe protective measures we must implement, if necessary. These could include the utilization of water removal equipment such as a pump, or the installation of special shoring or a trench shield designed to protect workers inside the excavation from the hazards of water and cave-ins. And in some unusual cases, it may even be necessary for the Competent Person to require someone entering an excavation filled with water to wear a personal floatation device and harness which is attached to a lifeline.

The main point of this toolbox talk is to help you remember that you must not enter an excavation in which any water is accumulated or accumulating until the Competent Person has evaluated the situation. Then we can decide on the proper protective measures to take before giving you the

okay to enter! Keep an eye out for water in or around excavations and alert the Competent Person.

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