

Safety News

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News About Occupational Safety and Health in CONSTRUCTION

Reflecting On Solar Panel Work

Solar panels are designed to produce electrical energy when they are exposed to the sun. Contact with these panels can result in burns, sparks, and shock. Get training on the solar panels that you will install, maintain and repair. Know how they are wired and connected and about the flow and storage of energy in the system. Know the voltages that are produced so that you can have the proper level of electrical work training, tools, and personal protective equipment (PPE).

Practice the control of hazardous energy (lockout/blockout). Learn the points at which you can shutoff and lockout electricity before you begin your work. Lockout and guard terminals to prevent accidental contact. Work in dry conditions only! Use properly insulated tools to prevent arcing of electricity. Keep flammable materials and gases away from solar panels. If necessary, cover the face of the solar panel to protect yourself from contacting the hot surface.

Solar panels are often installed on rooftops and elevated locations. Use proper fall protection measures and protective equipment when you install and maintain panels at a height. Ideally, work behind elevated edge barriers or install the panels more than 6 feet from the unprotected edge. If you must wear fall protection near unprotected edges, make sure it is properly anchored to prevent an accidental fall.

Use ladders safely when you access elevated panels and locations. Stay facing the ladder and in the center during work; avoid leaning to either side. Make

sure that the ladder is rated for electrical work and your weight plus your tools and materials.

Solar power components can be large and heavy. Protect your body from strains and sprains by using mechanical lift devices whenever possible. If you must lift, do it correctly, with your leg muscles and



a straight back. Keep loads close to your body and avoid twisting. If you must hoist tools and equipment to elevated locations, follow safe work procedures. Use secure connections, rigging rated for the load weight, and avoid hoisting over coworkers' heads.

Solar panels are often installed in remote locations, so get training in site security and field safety. Learn about the hazardous snakes and bugs in your work area. Get first aid training and keep first aid supplies available in case of a bite or sting. Work with a partner and maintain good communication with your worksite about your location and the expected duration of your work. □

Brush Up On Safe Work Practices

Painters encounter physical and ergonomic demands in the course of their work performance. As they apply coatings and paint to interior and exterior building surfaces, they may also be exposed to a variety of chemicals and solvents. That's why it's important for painters to be aware of the hazards that are associated with a job or jobsites and then take the necessary safety precautions to protect both their health and their safety.

If you are a painter, before you begin a new painting task, you should take care to choose and wear proper personal protective equipment. Goggles or safety glasses can protect your eyes from paint splashes during application and mixing. Gloves and coveralls help to protect your skin from chemical contact. For some jobs, it may be necessary to wear a recommended and approved respirator to protect you from inhaling dusts, spray paint droplets, and the fumes from solvents and paints.

Read the material safety data sheet (MSDS) to learn about the chemicals in paints and surface preparation materials you use. Even though a material may be water-based and labeled "green," it can still contain hazardous ingredients. Good ventilation with spray booths, fans, open doors, and windows can

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FROM OUR EXPERT

Valley Fever – Blowing In The Wind

Valley Fever (a disease named after the San Joaquin Valley) is caused by inhaling the spores of fungi called *Coccidioides*. These fungi live in semiarid soil and are found in the southwestern United States and parts of Mexico and South America. The medical term for Valley Fever is coccidioidomycosis. Over 2500 cases of coccidioidomycosis were reported in California in 2008. The actual number of infections was likely higher.

About 60% of infections with *Coccidioides* do not cause any symptoms. Infected persons with symptoms usually experience a flu-like illness, with fever, cough, headache, rash, and muscle aches, but severe pneumonia can develop. Symptoms typically occur 1-4 weeks after exposure.

While most people recover from Valley Fever within weeks to months after developing symptoms, a small percentage fails to recover and develops chronic lung infection or the infection spreads from the lungs to other parts of the body, a serious condition known as disseminated coccidioidomycosis. This condition most commonly results in skin lesions, central nervous system infection, and bone and joint

infection. Fortunately, less than 1% of patients develop the disseminated disease; those at increased risk include people of African, Asian, or Filipino descent, pregnant women in their third trimester, and persons with weakened immune systems.



Unlike some infectious diseases, Valley Fever is not spread from person to person.

People get infected with *Coccidioides* by inhaling fungal spores that become airborne after soil disturbance. Construction, excavation, agriculture, and archaeological digging are some occupations which can disturb the soil and

put workers at increased risk. Natural phenomenon (wind storms, dust storms, and earthquakes) and recreational activities (dirt biking and driving ATVs or 4-wheel drive vehicles off-road) can also disturb the soil and put people at increased risk.

Employers should take steps to protect workers who are potentially exposed. Control measures include dust control (for example, wetting of soil), enclosed cabs on heavy equipment, and use of respirators. Employees that work in occupations with potential exposure should receive training on the signs and symptoms of the disease.

Individuals that develop symptoms of Valley Fever should seek medical care and let their doctor know if they live, work, or travel in an area where Valley Fever is endemic. The disease can be diagnosed through blood tests or specimen cultures.

For more information on coccidioidomycosis, visit the Centers for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov. □

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move fresh air into your workspace and protect you from hazardous or explosive paint and solvent fumes.

As preparing surfaces by sanding and cleaning can expose you to certain harmful dusts, make sure you've been trained in the building hazards of asbestos, mold, and lead and that only trained workers clean up these hazards before you disturb them and make them airborne. Choose the correct tools for the task. Use tool handles long enough to prevent you from over-reaching with soft, slip-resistant, comfortable handles that fit your hand.

Many painting activities involve repetitive move-

ments and awkward positions, so rotate your job tasks during the day and take rest breaks to prevent fatigue. Use proper lifting techniques to protect your back. And, wear comfortable work boots with slip-resistant soles that will support your feet as you stand all day.

Indoors and out, all year long, painting jobsites expose you to hot and cold weather. Dress in light layers that protect you from the sun and cold. If painting is done at heights, follow safety procedures for ladder or scaffold setup, inspection, and use. Make sure a qualified person properly installed the scaffolding. And, know when to use

fall protection and how to use it properly. Practice good housekeeping on the jobsite to prevent slips, trips, and falls.

Painting is a physical job, so maintain your overall health and fitness. Practice good hygiene by washing up during and after work. Keep your work clothes and shoes separate from your family to prevent cross-contamination at home. When you work alone, secure your jobsite by locking doors; communicate your location and expected job duration with others. □



Loss Control Services

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This Newsletter

We're Here For You

State Fund's Safety & Health Services Department maintains a staff of highly trained and experienced professionals including Loss Control Consultants, Industrial Hygienists, and Ergonomists who produce a wide range of safety and health products and provide services to insureds, Brokers, and stakeholders.

Products and services are reflective of current Cal/OSHA guidelines and standards and include:

- **Newsletters** – Clients receive quarterly industry-specific newsletters with safety, health, and compliance recommendations and bi-lingual safety meeting topics.
- **Seminars** – State Fund-sponsored seminars on regulatory, safety, or health issues are conducted statewide throughout the year.
- **Training Products** – There is ongoing product development of hard copy and downloadable brochures, training CDs, and ErgoMatters®.
- **Safety Meeting Topics and Loss Control Bulletins** – We have produced over 300 online bilingual safety topics that include sign-in sheets for recordkeeping.
- **Safety and Health Experts** – Our staff of Loss Control Consultants, Industrial Hygienists and Ergonomists conduct on-site surveys, partnering with clients' efforts to establish safe workplaces.

For more information, call your local State Fund Office or visit www.scif.com. □

Employer Education Series

State Fund continues to promote community educational outreach by increasing the quantity and frequency of employer seminars. These seminars are produced and sponsored by State Fund and are open to State Fund policyholders. The seminar topics cover all aspects of worker's compensation and are offered statewide.

As part of State Fund's Employer Education Series, the local State Fund Loss Control departments offer safety seminars dedicated to loss prevention. They feature safety training targeted to specific industries and safety topics of interest to California employers. Various programs in the series are developed in conjunction with State Fund insured Group Programs and external affiliates and partners. Some of these partners are occupational safety and health providers such as Cal/OSHA Consultation Service, the Department of Health Services, and the University of California.

The goal of State Fund's Employer Education Series is to present valuable information from recognized safety and health experts to enable employers to reduce the frequency and severity of workplace injuries, facilitate regulatory compliance, and increase business profits.

The program venues provide the opportunity for attendees to have their workplace safety questions immediately and personally answered by industry experts. The typically half-day seminars are usually held at regional State Fund offices. To learn what programs are scheduled in your area, visit www.scif.com and click on Seminars. □

Reporting Work-Related Injuries

State Fund's Claims Reporting Center (1-888-222-3211) is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for policyholders to report injuries as soon as they occur. Agents will do the necessary paperwork to get the claim started and refer the injured to the designated physician or provider.

Within 8 hours of any serious illness or injury (requiring hospitalization over 24 hours, other than for medical observation or where there is permanent employee disfigurement) or death occurring in the workplace or in connection with employment, employers must report the incident to the Division of Occupational Safety and Health. □

This Construction Safety News is produced by the Safety and Health Services Department of State Fund to assist clients in their loss control efforts. Information or recommendations contained in this publication were obtained from sources believed to be reliable at the date of publication. Information is only advisory and does not presume to be exhaustive or inclusive of all workplace hazards or situations. Permission to reprint articles subject to approval by State Compensation Insurance Fund.

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