

Women In Construction

Many women think that their male co-workers are more adept due to the benefits they receive from mentoring, coaching, and general acceptance by their male colleagues. Some of the problems experienced by tradeswomen in construction in a US study seem to reflect this:



"[The men] had a lot of little tricks that made the job easier. But no one ever showed me those tricks."

"They gave me gloves so humongous, I couldn't even pick anything up."

"Sometimes they drop things on you, hammers and wrenches— dangerous things like that, supposedly by accident. . . "

"When you have more than one woman working with you, you have a better chance. You don't want to be alone. The stress is incredible."

Health And Safety Ideas

As the workforce becomes more diverse, construction industry employers, labour unions, training programmes, manufacturers and employees may need to revise traditional practices in order to provide safe, healthy and fair conditions for all. Here are some ideas for meeting this new challenge.

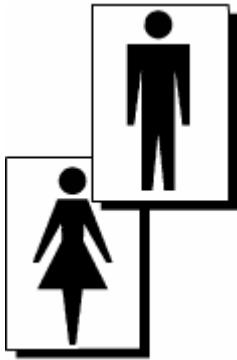
Health And Safety Training

- Employers and unions should make skills training courses available and encourage all workers to take advantage of them.
- Journeymen should establish mentoring relationships with new workers to provide informal skills and safety training.
- Supervisors need to emphasise safety as well as productivity on the jobsite.
- Employers should emphasise that safety training is as important as skills training.

Personal Protective Equipment & Clothing (PPE/PPC)

- The design of PPE and PPC for women should be based on female measurements.
- Manufacturers of PPE and PPC should be encouraged by the construction industry to collect information on all sizes and use it to expand the range of sizes offered in both clothing and equipment.
- Union apprenticeship programmes should provide tradeswomen with resources on where to find equipment and clothing that fits.
- Employers should make sure that workers of all sizes have well-fitting PPE and PPC for safe and efficient performance.

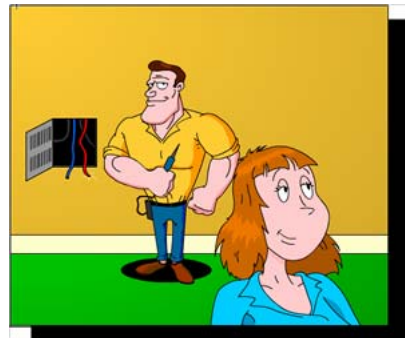
Sanitary Facilities



- Gender-separate sanitary facilities should be provided on worksites. They should have inside and outside locking mechanisms.
- Where change rooms are provided on construction sites, they should also be gender separated and provided with inside and outside locking mechanisms.
- Employees should be allowed to use sanitary or hand washing facilities as needed.
- Toilet facilities should be kept clean and in good repair with clean toilet paper within reach.
- Hand-washing facilities should exist within close proximity to toilet facilities.

Workplace Culture

- Employers, apprenticeship programmes, and unions (where responsible) should review all communication materials to ensure that they are gender neutral, and include positive images of the different 'faces' or workers in all visual materials (videos, posters, pictures, etc).
- Employers, apprenticeship programmes, and unions (where responsible) should when possible and when the situation calls for it, assign female workers in pairs (at least). This is especially important for those new to the trades.
- Employers, unions, and apprenticeship programmes should provide training and guidelines on the safety, health and equal treatment of all workers, members, or trainees to their supervisory personnel, teachers and representatives.



Ergonomics

- It should be accepted that some workers need to use different lifting and material handling techniques.
- Employers, unions, apprenticeship programmes, and other training entities should review skills training programmes to see whether alternative methods are included for getting work accomplished by workers of different sizes or strengths. All programmes should emphasise the importance of safe lifting.
- Workers need to hear from employers and unions that it's acceptable to ask for help and to explore alternative ways to lift and carry.
- All workers should be trained in the proper ways to lift and bend.
- Manufacturers should design tools and equipment with ergonomic considerations in mind.

Injury And Illness Data And Research

- Collecting accurate data to measure safety and health concerns is the only way to keep track of problems and progress.
- Employers should try to collect data by gender and pay attention to differences in reporting by men and women.
- Unions should try to keep track of complaints by men and women with respect to health and safety concerns.

Reproductive Hazards

- Employers should post Material Safety Data Sheets for each chemical present on the worksite.
- Workers should read all Material Safety Data Sheets and share the information with their physicians, if they are pregnant or planning to start a family.
- All workers should educate themselves about the potential reproductive risks from exposure to certain chemicals.
- Employers should make reasonable accommodations for workers in later stages of pregnancy, rather than forcing them out of the workplace.
- During the later stages of pregnancy women should consult with their physician about strenuous physical activities on the job.

