

NEWS FROM NEW JERSEY WORK ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL

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Free Information Available to Employers, Contractors, Construction Workers, Day Laborers, Community Residents, and Volunteers To Protect Health and Safety During Demolition and Rebuilding After Hurricane Sandy

Free information about workplace health and safety hazards during the Sandy recovery and rebuilding process is available from the N.J. Work Environment Council (WEC) at www.SaferAfterSandy.org.

The information is useful to employers, contractors, construction workers, day laborers, community residents, and volunteers involved in demolition and rebuilding.

“The direct effects of Sandy were bad enough,” said John Pajak, vice president of Teamsters Local 877 and president of the New Jersey Work Environment Council. “We don’t want to see more people injured or made sick by preventable hazards during the rebuilding process.”

WEC is a coalition of more than 70 environmental, union, and community organizations.

Some of the hazards covered by WEC’s free materials include the following:

Illnesses from mold. Mold resulting from Sandy’s flooding can cause allergic reactions, skin rashes, or make asthma worse. When mold is being removed, employers should provide N-95 respirators – not paper masks – to filter it out of air workers breathe. They also should provide training on how to use the respirator. Goggles and gloves also should be provided.

Falls. As workers are assigned to work on roofs or other high places during post-Sandy reconstruction, employers have a legal responsibility to provide protection from falls, which are the leading cause of workplace deaths among construction workers in the U.S. That means providing fall protection and the right kinds of ladders, scaffolds, safety gear, and training.

Electrical hazards. All electrical equipment must be inspected for damage caused by moisture and other damage that may have been caused by the storm.

Airborne Contaminants. Storm damage may lead to exposure to asbestos or other toxic substances that can cause cancer or other serious illnesses.

Employers are required to provide a safe workplace by the federal law known as the Occupational Safety and Health Act, which is enforced by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

Since Sandy, OSHA has issued citations following inspections for electrical hazards, toxic substances, and construction site hazards such as potential falls without proper safety protections.

Workers who want to file a complaint with OSHA can call 1-800-321-OSHA.

It is a violation of the OSHA law for an employer to fire, demote, transfer, deny a raise, reduce hours, or discriminate in any way against a worker for filing a complaint or using other OSHA rights.

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