Safe at EVERY STAGE

BY ALFONSO GONZALEZ

Six safety tips to keep in mind for steel fabrication and erection.

SAFETY IS MORE THAN just following a list of rules or wearing the right equipment.

While the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires all employers to provide a safe working environment for all workers and implement the required safety standards to reduce workplace injuries; general awareness, location-specific insight and common sense can also go a long way in ensuring a safe environment.

In the steel fabrication industry, where workers are exposed to processes like metal cutting, welding, bending, assembly and erection, the potential for injuries can be high—but it certainly doesn't have to be that way. The majority of injury cases in fabrication shops occur as a result of carelessness, lack of proper employee training and worker reluctance to follow safety procedures. But if you address these issues and others, you can help ensure that your shop is as safe as any workplace.

Here are my top six safety tips to keep in mind during steel fabrication and erection:

1. Identify Workplace Risks

Risk assessment is considered the first critical step when it comes to ensuring worker safety. Knowing the potential risks that can pose safety hazards to workers can help you formulate an effective safety and health plan while also developing emergency plans in case something unexpected happens. The ultimate goal is to ensure a secure working environment at every stage of steel fabrication and erection.

Supervisors and safety experts in charge should follow specific procedures when identifying workplace safety risks, such as:

- Determine the workplace or on-site hazards
- Identify workers who are most likely to be harmed and by what means
- Weigh up the safety risks and establish solid safety measures
- Document your risk assessment findings
- Examine your risk assessment again and revise if required

It's important for supervisors and safety experts to consult with workers to get their insights and day-to-day work experiences. This will go a long way into helping them develop a more effective workplace and on-site safety plan that ensures everyone's safety.

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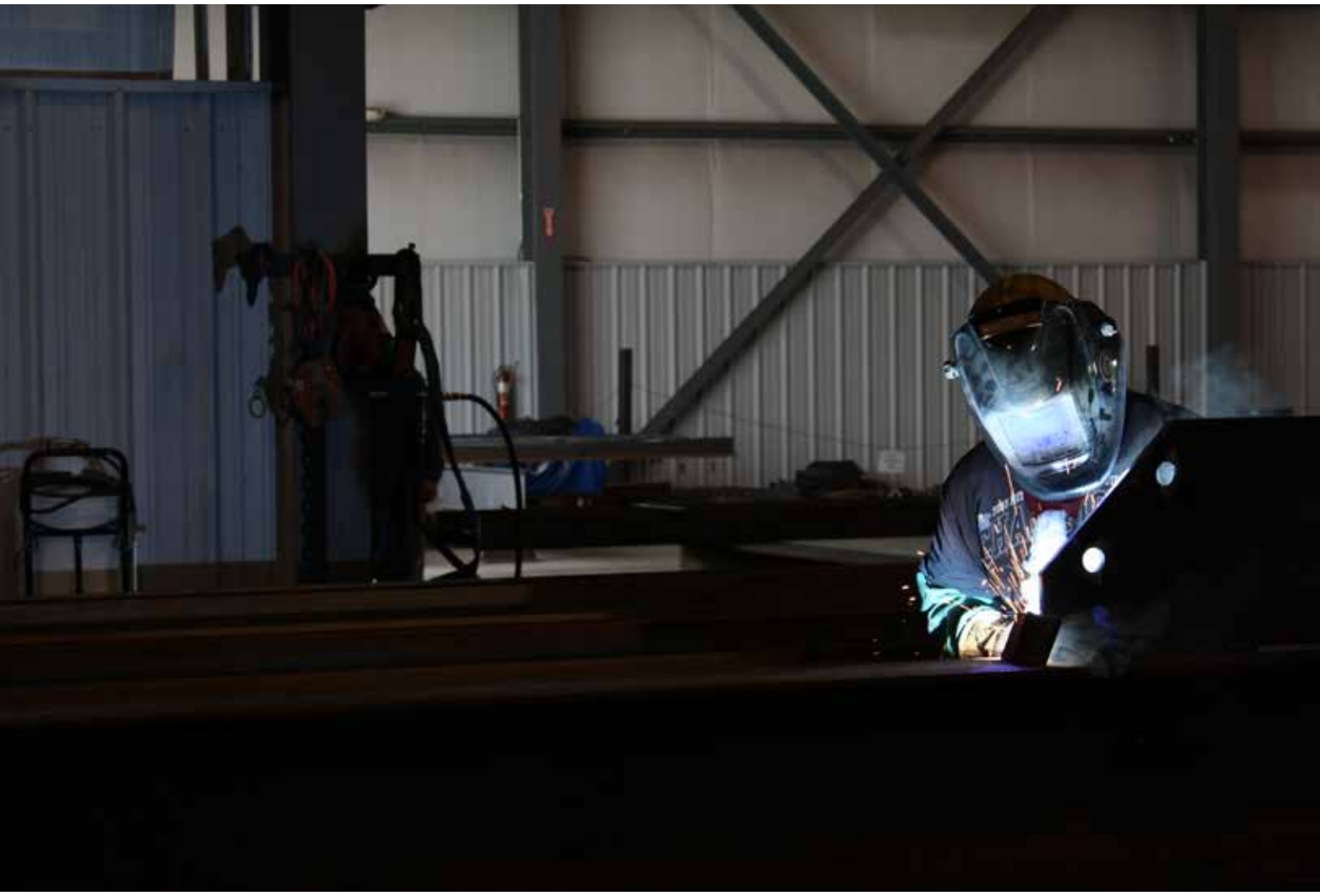
2. Implement Workplace Safety Measures

Steel fabrication and erection involve many different processes that need proper care when handling materials and equipment. It's crucial that the right safety measures are followed for each of these processes. In order to avoid injuries on the job, it is mandatory to comply fully with OSHA standards . While most metal fabrication companies and shops have workplace safety plans in place, few of them implement them to their fullest extent. But doing so is critical to reducing injuries. A safer working environment helps improve production operations while also increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of your employees. As an employer, you must also ensure that safety guidelines and hazard signs are easily visible at all times.



If you don't already, make an effort to display all the vital safety signs and information within your workplace so you can remind your workers of the proper safety procedures to follow when carrying out their specific tasks. Visible hazard signs can help you enforce extra caution in certain steel fabrication and installation processes so that you can prevent accidental injuries.

3. Provide Proper Employee Training

Every employee must receive proper training before they start working in a shop or on a job site. This is critical in ensuring that they perform their duties correctly and safely. It's important that employees also hold relevant certifications that demonstrate knowledge in their areas of expertise and know the right thing to do without putting themselves at risk of being injured. Safety training is considered the key driver in reducing workplace injuries.

It's important to develop a simple, effective and practical safety training program that trains your employees on the best practice policies and the proper use of metal fabrication tools, systems and equipment. This is critical in helping them understand how to handle their work safely and follow the right storage procedures for machinery in workshops.

Safety training also introduces to workers the types of injuries that are common to their working environment, informing them of the potential risks and hazards that they could encounter and help them perform their steel fabrication and erection tasks more responsibly.

4. Supply Personal Protective Equipment

Fabrication shops must safeguard their workers by supplying the right personal protective equipment to prevent the risk of injuries, health issues and accidents. Metal fabrication and erection workers should always wear protective clothing and gear. Such clothing includes long-sleeved shirts, gloves, long pants, safety goggles, earplugs and hard hats or helmets. Wearing the right safety shoes is also important to prevent slipping and falling on materials. Safety-toed shoes are essential to protect toes from falling objects.

But providing protective clothing and equipment alone is not enough. Workers must be trained in the proper use of personal protective equipment, how to identify defects and proper care and storage procedures. Supervisors must ensure that protective equipment is available to all workers and follow up to ensure that every worker is wearing protective gear as expected.

5. Practice Proper Tool and Equipment Usage

Tool- and equipment-related injuries are one of the most recorded injury types in the metal fabrication industry. Before any employee uses welding equipment, metal cutting and folding equipment, or any other equipment, they should learn the proper way to use it. Improper use can cause serious injuries. Tools must also be inspected before being used to ensure they're in perfect working condition.

Whether workers are using large commercial-grade machines or simple tools like metal cutting saws, the right safety precautions must be followed when using the tools to prevent accidental injuries. For instance, wearing loose clothing or jewelry that can be caught in a machine can easily cause injuries. In addition, the built-in safety features of any and all equipment should be reviewed and understood by their operators.

6. Perform Regular Inspections and Maintenance

To ensure that metal fabrication shops and job sites are safe, regular inspections and maintenance procedures must be carried out to ensure that workers are following safety procedures as expected. Inspections also help reveal any faulty machines that need repairs.

Steel fabrication and erection procedures involve several key safety concerns, but by managing the safety risks within the work environment, you can easily prevent injuries. Increased safety results from considering the issue from all angles, and making sure that the various procedures aren't just understood, but also followed. ■