Poor housekeeping and storage practices on construction jobsites account for, but do not often get the credit for, a significant percentage of accidents and injuries that occur each year. We all know how fast things can accumulate on site. Items such as scrap lumber, broken bricks, pieces of drywall, strap-bands and packaging can easily end up lying around in inappropriate places on site if not properly disposed of. When this occurs, we have created a situation that makes it very difficult to concentrate on our work, potentially adding to the likelihood of slipping, falling, or tripping over garbage and debris.

Construction debris is often odd shaped and can pose unique hazards such as puncture, cut and tripping hazards. We all recognize the dangers that a board with a protruding nail, a rake laying face up or even a broken piece of brick can pose and the injury that can be suffered with each. As we start a new construction season and new jobs, new opportunities are created for us to implement good housekeeping practices, and to continue them throughout the entire length of the job.

Housekeeping means preventing scrap and debris from lying around by placing items in containers, and making sure they are emptied regularly. Housekeeping can also mean proper storage of materials and equipment. We must first recognize what items will be introduced to the site and plan a location for each type. It can be as simple as identifying a place to park equipment when it is not being used.

Here are a few tips that can be followed to help keep the jobsite safe:

• Clean up as work proceeds.
• Keep equipment and the areas around equipment free of scrap and debris.
• Keep stairways, ramps and other travel areas clear.
• Secure loose or light material stored on site to prevent it from blowing away in the wind.
• Never lay or store material that could fall and injure someone at the edge of an excavation or elevated surface.
• Store material so that it won’t roll or slide. It may be necessary to block or chock items to prevent them from moving.
• Before storing scrap materials, take a moment to remove or bend over any protruding nails and other items that can cause harm.
• Be conscious of waste that can be flammable and/or ignitable, and never store it in the vicinity of ignition sources.

Good housekeeping is one of the first steps to safety on the jobsite. When it is practiced and in place, it allows us to focus more on some of the other inherent dangers that construction work poses. Even if a job doesn’t start off with good housekeeping in mind, we can always make adjustments to clean up the site and add this practice to an existing site. Take a moment to survey the site that you are currently working on to ensure that hazards from debris are identified and appropriately dealt with to ensure safety on the jobsite. A clean site is interpreted to be a safe site.

Think Safety!