



WisCon Words of Wisdom

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October Awareness Topics

October 5-11: [Fire Prevention Week™](#)

October 20-24: [National School Bus Safety Week](#)

All month long:

[Substance Abuse Prevention](#)

[Crime Prevention](#)

[Protecting Your Hearing](#)

Sunscreen Isn't Just for Summer

You may associate using sunscreen with the summer months or only being applicable to “younger” people. It’s important to protect your skin from UV radiation regardless of the season or your age. Older people may think that it’s too late to protect their skin, but according to UW dermatologist, Apple Bodemer, MD’01, “Once you start getting a few mutated cells, the more times you hit them with that UV radiation, the faster they’re going to continue to mutate, and the faster they’re going to recruit other cells leading to the development of skin cancer.”

The sun is at its peak intensity from 10 am to 4 pm. [Dr. Bodemer](#) recommends that you avoid the midday sun by either seeking shade or wearing protective clothing and/or sunscreen.

We want to hear from you!

What content would you like to see in an upcoming newsletter? Let us know [here](#).

Farm Equipment on Roadways

This time of year, you may see agricultural equipment on the roadways. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) refers to tractors, trailers and other vehicles that are used for agricultural work as Implements of Husbandry (IoH) and Agricultural Commercial Vehicles (Ag CMVs). Detailed information on these requirements can be found at: [Wisconsin Department of Transportation Agricultural vehicle safety](#). It is important to understand that while on the road, IoH and Ag CMVs operate differently than motor vehicles in that they move at slower speeds and weigh tons more. A lot of farm equipment moves at speeds of 25 mph, regardless of the posted speed limit. In terms of weight, a typical tractor pulling two 300-bushel gravity flow wagons can easily weigh 20 to 30 tons compared to a car which is typically 1-2 tons. (See: [Time to upgrade our thinking on highway risk before its too late](#).) These and other factors contribute to the unfortunate statistic that roadway deaths account for 15-30% of Wisconsin farm workplace fatalities. (see: [Lighting and Marking.pdf](#))

October is National Protect Your Hearing Month

National Protect Your Hearing Month, observed each October, highlights the importance of preventing noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL), especially in occupational settings. According to NIOSH, over 30 million U.S. workers are exposed to hazardous noise levels each year. NIHL remains one of the most common—and most preventable—work-related health issues.

Excessive workplace noise damages hearing, interferes with communication by masking alarms or verbal warnings, and increases stress. Because hearing loss often develops gradually, it may go unnoticed until it becomes significant and permanent.

To address this risk, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) established the Occupational Noise Exposure Standard (29 CFR 1910.95). This regulation requires employers to implement a Hearing Conservation Program when workers are exposed to noise at or above 85 decibels (dBA) averaged over an 8-hour shift. Required components include noise monitoring, annual hearing tests (audiograms), employee training, provision of hearing protection devices, and accurate recordkeeping.

In addition to compliance, best practices for reducing noise exposure include engineering controls (such as quieter machinery or sound barriers) and administrative strategies (like rotating tasks or limiting exposure times). Consistent use of properly fitted hearing protection and regular training are essential to preventing permanent hearing damage.

National Protect Your Hearing Month is an ideal time to review your organization’s approach to hearing safety. If you have not previously tested the noise levels in your facility or need to update your hearing conservation program, WisCon may be able to assist you.

Tool Box Talk: Ladder Safety

Ladders are tools we use almost every single day, either at work or at home. As a example, at this time of year many people have their gutters cleaned, whether they do it themselves or leave it to the professionals. Because we use them so often, it's easy to get complacent. But falls from ladders are one of the leading causes of serious injuries and even fatalities on the job. The good news is that nearly every ladder accident is preventable.

Let's quickly go over the four key things to remember to keep ourselves safe.

1. Choose the Right Ladder

Before you even move a ladder, stop and think. Is it the right one for the job?

- **Height:** Is it tall enough? For an extension ladder, it must extend at least **3 feet** above the landing point you're stepping onto. Never, ever stand on the top step or the top cap of a stepladder.
- **Capacity (Duty Rating):** Is it strong enough? The ladder needs to support your weight PLUS the weight of your tools and materials. Check the sticker on the side rail.
- **Material:** Are you working near electricity? **Never use an aluminum ladder near overhead power lines or any live electrical source.** Grab a fiberglass ladder instead.

2. Inspect Before You Climb (Every Single Time)

This takes 30 seconds and could save your life. Before you set it up, give it a quick once-over:

- **Check the rungs and steps:** Are they free of mud, grease, and oil? Are any of them bent, cracked, or loose?
- **Check the side rails:** Are they cracked, split, or bent?
- **Check the feet:** Are the non-slip pads in good condition? On an extension ladder, do the feet pivot correctly?
- **Check the hardware:** On a stepladder, do the spreader bars lock firmly in place? On an extension ladder, do the rung locks engage properly and is the rope in good shape?

If you find ANYTHING wrong, what do you do? You take it out of service. Tag it "**DANGEROUS - DO NOT USE**" and report it immediately. Don't just set it aside for someone else to grab by mistake.

3. The Perfect Setup

Where and how you set up the ladder is just as important as the ladder itself.

- **Foundation:** Always place the ladder on a **firm, level, and stable surface**. Never set it up on uneven ground, boxes, or loose bricks.

- **The 4-to-1 Rule (for Extension Ladders):** This is critical. For every 4 feet of height to the point of support, the base of the ladder should be 1 foot away from the wall. An easy way to check this is to stand with your toes at the base of the ladder and extend your arms straight out. You should be able to just touch the rungs.
- **Location:** Don't set up a ladder in front of a door that isn't blocked, locked, or guarded. If you're in a high-traffic area, use barriers and signs.
- **Secure It:** Whenever possible, secure the top of the ladder to prevent it from slipping.

4. Climb and Work Safely

You've chosen the right ladder, inspected it, and set it up perfectly. Now, use it correctly.

- **Three Points of Contact:** This is the golden rule. Always maintain **two hands and one foot OR two feet and one hand** on the ladder when climbing or descending.
- **Face the Ladder:** Always face the ladder when going up or down.
- **Don't Overreach:** Keep your belt buckle between the side rails. If you have to lean way out to the side, you're overreaching. Get down and move the ladder. It's faster than a trip to the hospital.
- **Carry Tools Safely:** Use a tool belt or a rope and bucket to hoist materials. Don't carry tools or materials in your hands while climbing. You need your hands to maintain three points of contact.

Open Discussion:

- Does anyone have any questions?
- Has anyone seen a near-miss involving a ladder that we can learn from?
- Are there any locations on this site where setting up a ladder is particularly tricky?

Final Word: Ladders are simple tools, but they demand our full respect. Take the extra minute to choose the right one, inspect it, and set it up properly. Look out for yourselves and look out for your teammates.

Additional ladder safety information can be found at:

- [HA-Ladders.pdf](#)
- [TT-Falls Extension Ladders.pdf](#)
- [Ladder Safety OSHA Publications](#)

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