
The toolbox-talk pack

Ten talks written to be read on a phone in about four minutes, a sign-off sheet for the sites that still want paper, and a one-page site induction.

What is inside

- Ten talks - working at height, isolation and lock-off, manual handling, hot works, asbestos awareness, PPE, vibration, confined spaces, lone working, slips and trips
- Each talk: why it matters, the talk itself, and two questions to check it landed
- A blank sign-off sheet for up to twelve names
- A one-page site induction for a new starter

Yours whether or not you ever talk to us.

How to run a four-minute talk

These are written to be read out, not handed round. Four minutes on a wet Tuesday beats a half-day course nobody remembers.

The shape that works

- Stand where the work actually happens if you can - the scaffold, the plant room, the van back doors. The talk lands harder next to the thing it is about.
- Read the points as written, then say the one that matters most on this job in your own words.
- Ask the two questions at the end. If nobody can answer, read the point again - that is the talk working, not failing.
- Everyone signs the sheet, including you. A signature the man can remember signing is worth more than one he cannot.
- Keep it to four minutes. Attention is the whole budget.

A note on what this is

These talks cover the ordinary week of a trade subcontractor: electrical, HVAC, roofing and plumbing work. They are a prompt for a competent person to use, not a substitute for training, a risk assessment, or the law. If a job needs more than a talk, it needs more than a talk.

Free to copy, print and use on your sites, with or without us.

Working at height

Falls from height are still the trade's biggest killer, and almost every one of them happened on a job somebody thought was quick.

The talk

- The rule is simple: if you would not jump from there, you do not work from there without a guard, a harness, or a platform.
- A ladder is access, not a workplace. Over three points of contact, and no more than thirty minutes in one stretch on the same rung.
- Scaffold gets a green tag or it does not get used. A missing tag is a red one.
- Roof work means edge protection or a harness with somewhere real to anchor it - a chimney stack is not an anchor.
- Fragile surfaces - roof lights, old asbestos cement, felt on decayed decking - are walked around, never across.
- Nothing gets thrown down from height. Tools go in a bag; loose materials go down on a rope or in a bucket.
- Weather call: wind moves a ladder and makes a roof greasy. If you are arguing about whether it is too windy, it is.
- If a harness is worn, it gets a pre-use check the way power tools do. A frayed lanyard is a spent one.

Ask the crew

- How long is too long on one ladder stretch, and what do we do instead?
- Name two surfaces on our jobs you never step on. What do you do when you meet one?

Name

Signature

Date

Isolation and lock-off

Every year electricians and plumbers are hurt by circuits somebody else - or they themselves - switched back on.

The talk

- Isolate, lock, prove dead. All three, every time. Testing is what proves it; assuming is what kills.
- Your own padlock, your own key, one person per lock. If two of you are on the circuit, two locks sit on it.
- Lock-off on the board, not just the local isolator - the fuse you cannot see is the one that gets you.
- Leave a tag with your name and number. The next person deserves to know who holds the circuit.
- Live working is a last resort with a permit and a second person - not a way to save twenty minutes.
- After the work: tools out, covers on, check the area, then remove YOUR lock last of all.
- Plants, pumps and pressurised systems isolate the same way - valve shut, locked, and the pressure vented before a joint is cracked.
- If you find somebody else's lock, you stop and find them. You never cut it off.

Ask the crew

- What are the three steps, in order, before you touch a conductor?
- Two of us are working on one circuit - how many locks are on it, and whose?

Name

Signature

Date

Manual handling

Bad backs end careers quietly - no incident report, just years of pain that started with one boiler off a van.

The talk

- Plan the lift before your hands touch it: where is it going, what is in the way, can it split into two lifts or two people.
- Heavy does not mean obvious: a sheet of ply in the wind and an awkward radiator both hurt people who "knew how to lift".
- Load close, feet apart, back straight-ish, drive with the legs. The technique you were taught still works.
- Ask. A second pair of hands costs thirty seconds; a slipped disc costs a season.
- Mechanical help first: trolley, sack barrow, stair climber, tail lift. The van has them because they pay.
- Think about the far end of the lift - the carry through a narrow door is where the twist injury happens. Move the obstruction first.
- Cold muscles injure easier: on a freezing morning the first lift of the day is the one to be careful with.
- Cut the weight at the source where you can - order bagged cement, take the panels off the boiler before you move it.

Ask the crew

- What do we check before the hands go on?
- Name two lifting aids on the van and what each is actually for.

Name

Signature

Date

Hot works

A grinder spark can smoulder in insulation for four hours and burn the building down after everyone has gone home.

The talk

- No hot work without a permit for the job - even on your own yard. The permit is a five-minute checklist that asks where the sparks go.
- Clear eleven metres where possible, or shield what cannot move. Sparks travel further than they look like they do.
- A fire watch stays thirty minutes after the last spark. The person watching does not pack up while the grinder is still warm.
- Extinguisher in reach before the tool is switched on - right type, serviced, and you know how the pin comes out.
- Never above flammables, never on a roof with bitumen or felt nearby without a second extinguisher and a mat.
- Gases and solvents: check what is in the room, not just what you brought into it. Vapour finds sparks the way water finds holes.
- When it is done: check, then check again an hour later if you can. Most hot-work fires start after the crew leaves.

Ask the crew

- How long does the fire watch stay, and when does it start?
- What three things do you have in place before the first spark?

Name

Signature

Date

Asbestos awareness

It is still in most buildings refurbished before 2000, and the danger is entirely about disturbing it without knowing.

The talk

- The question on every unfamiliar job, especially pre-2000 buildings: where is the asbestos survey, and if there is not one, who stops the job?
- Suspect materials: old cement board, textured coatings like Artex, pipe lagging, floor tiles and their adhesives, bitumen felt, rope gaskets on old boilers.
- You never drill, cut, sand or break suspect material. The risk is the dust you cannot see.
- If it is disturbed by accident: stop, keep everyone out, no brushing, no hoovering with a domestic machine, report it up.
- Wet rags and a type-H vacuum clean up - a brush and a normal vac spread it.
- Licensed contractors remove the high-risk stuff - lagging, insulation, sprayed coating. No exceptions, no favours.
- Your mask and overalls protect against a lot of things, but work with asbestos is not a DIY decision at any level of PPE.

Ask the crew

- What year did the building have to be built before we ask the question by default?
- You have drilled and dust has come out. What are the next three things you do?

Name

Signature

Date

PPE that earns its place

PPE is the last line after the job has been made safe - so wearing it right is the part that is actually in your hands.

The talk

- Boots with a mid-sole and toe cap on site, every site. The nail you stand on does not care how short the job is.
- Eye protection for anything that spins, chips, squirts or bangs - drilling overhead counts double.
- Gloves match the job: cut-resistant for sheet metal, nitrile for sealants and fluids, thermal for bitumen. The wrong glove is worse than none on a rotating tool.
- Hearing protection starts at the tools you have to shout over. Hearing loss does not come back.
- Hi-vis whenever plant, vehicles or the public share your space - including the walk from the van.
- A dusty job gets the right mask: FFP3 unless you know better for certain, and it needs a face seal, so beards and masks do not mix.
- Keep it clean and check it: a scratch-filled goggle and a cracked visor are decoration, not protection.

Ask the crew

- Which two tools today are over the shouting line?
- Why does a beard change the mask you can wear?

Name

Signature

Date

Hand-arm vibration

White finger and wrist damage are permanent, and they come from ordinary tools used day after day, not one bad day.

The talk

- The tools that do it are the everyday ones: breakers, grinders, chisels, sanders, needle guns - added up over the week.
- Cold and wet hands make it worse. Grips and gloves matter most on the worst mornings.
- Let the tool do the work: a crushing grip feeds vibration into you and tires you out faster anyway.
- Sharpen and service - a blunt blade makes the machine shake harder for longer.
- Share the loud tools between the crew when the job allows; rotate rather than one man grinding all afternoon.
- Watch the early signs: fingertips going white in the cold, tingling that stays, grip strength dropping. Say it early - it does not repair itself.
- Trigger time is the dose. Breaks are not slacking; they are the control.

Ask the crew

- Which of our tools carries the highest vibration, and how do we cut the time on it?
- What are the first two signs in your own hands to report?

Name

Signature

Date

Confined spaces

The spaces that kill - tanks, pits, ducts, deep manholes - usually kill the rescuer first. That is why entry is a decision, not a step.

The talk

- A confined space is anywhere closed-in where air can go wrong: tank, pit, void, loft over a hot plant, even deep trench near a sewer.
- Nobody enters without a permit, a gas check, and a second person who stays outside and stays watching.
- The air does not warn you: oxygen-poor and CO-rich spaces give you no smell and no time. The monitor is the only nose.
- Most deaths are would-be rescuers. If the man outside goes in after the man inside, now two families wait.
- Ventilate before and during. If the ventilation stops, the work stops.
- Communicate: rope, radio or voice, agreed signals, and a rescue plan that does not require improvising.
- If in doubt, the answer is that it is a confined space until somebody competent says otherwise.

Ask the crew

- Who goes in first on a confined-space job - and who stays out?
- Why is "I'll just duck in and pull him out" the most dangerous sentence on this site?

Name

Signature

Date

Lone working

Most of the trade works alone at some point in the week. The risk is not the incident - it is nobody knowing it happened.

The talk

- If nobody knows you are there, nobody is coming. Log the job, tell someone the address, and set the check-in time before you start.
- Check-in means a fixed time and a person who will act if it passes - not a text you send when you remember.
- Assess before you go in: an empty building, a basement plant room, a roof at dusk - each changes what you do and for how long.
- The public is a risk too: aggressive occupants, dogs, bad areas after dark. You are allowed to leave and call it in.
- Phone charged, signal checked, and a back-up - a whistle still works where a phone does not.
- High-risk work alone is a no: mains gas, live electrics, height without rescue, confined spaces. The ticket does not waive physics.
- Your call-out list and the office both need to know the plan, or the plan is a diary entry.

Ask the crew

- What are your next two lone jobs, and who holds the check-in for each?
- Name two jobs we never do alone, whatever the customer says on the phone.

Name

Signature

Date

Slips, trips and falls

Same-level falls are the most common injury on site and the cheapest to prevent - almost all of it is housekeeping.

The talk

- Cables across walkways, offcuts left standing, packaging in the dark - the three classics. Walk your own site and look at it as a stranger would.
- Clean as you go. Five minutes at the end of every hour beats an hour at the end of the day, and the floor stays usable meanwhile.
- Wet trades - screed, slurry, cleaning fluids - mean signage on the boundary and a dry route around, not a hopeful crossing.
- Trailing leads get routed high or taped flat; the extension to the chop saw is the one everybody trips on.
- Decent footwear tread, clean and unlugged of mud. Ladders and stepladders on clean, level ground only.
- Outside changes fast: rain on a timber deck, frost on scaffolding boards, leaves on the steps - each is a fifteen-second look before it is an ankle.
- Lighting is part of housekeeping: an unlit stair with stuff on it is not a storage area, it is a trap.

Ask the crew

- What are the three classic trip hazards we leave behind most often?
- Whose job is housekeeping on a two-man job - and what is the real answer?

Name

Signature

Date

Talk sign-off sheet

One row per person, per talk. Photocopy as many as the job needs.

Talk and date

Talk given

Crew present

Keep completed sheets with the site records - they are the evidence that the talk happened.

Site induction - one page

Before you start on any site

- Sign in with the office or the site manager every day, and sign out when you leave.
- Know two ways off the floor you are working on.
- Find the first-aid kit, the extinguisher and the assembly point before you need any of them.
- No tools live until you know the isolation points for what you are working on.

While you are on site

- Boots, hi-vis and the PPE the job calls for - from the van to the work area and back.
- You stop work and ask when something looks wrong. Stopping is always allowed.
- Report every near miss to the office the same day - a near miss today is someone's injury next month.
- Lone working means the office knows the address and the time you expect to be done.

Your details for this site

Name

Signature

Date

The same talk, but on their phones

The reason this pack is paper is that paper works everywhere. The weakness of paper is the record: the sheet in the van, the names that went missing, the March talk nobody can find when the client asks.

In Fivexer, the same ten-minute talk goes out as a job. Each person opens it on their own phone - no app store, no company email - reads it, and taps it done. The record is who tapped what and when, and it does not live in a van.

Nothing else changes: the talk is still yours, the crew is still yours, and this pack is still yours whether or not you ever look at it again.

- Try dispatching a shift yourself (90 seconds) - 5xer.com/duel/
- What this costs, published - 5xer.com/pricing/
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