GUIDELINES TO A PRODUCTIVE TOOLBOX TALK
Communication is one of the best ways to prevent accidents. One of the best ways of communicating the importance of safety on a construction job is through toolbox talks. You don’t have to be a professional speaker to give a good toolbox talk, but there are ways you can make your talks more effective. Let’s take a look at them.

PLANNING THE TOOLBOX TALK
• Know your topic and plan your agenda a few days before the meeting so you’re well prepared. (Be able to present the topic without reading it and lead a discussion afterward.)
• Coordinate handout literature or other material or equipment you intend to use at the meeting.
• Limit the length of your presentation. Given your operation, you would be the best judge of how much time to set aside. Generally speaking, a half-hour is adequate. Allow for questions and answers afterwards—about 15 minutes.

THE TOPIC
• Choose timely topics. Gear your talks to safety problems you are encountering at the moment or that you anticipate for upcoming jobs.
• Review recent injuries—What happened? Why did it happen? What should have been done?
• Review recent safety violations—What was the violation? What hazard did it create? What injury could have occurred?
• Review upcoming work schedule—What hazards are you concerned about? What safety equipment should be used? What procedures should be followed?

THE FORMAT
• Start the meeting out on a positive note.
• After welcoming your staff, promote teamwork and how toolbox meetings provide valuable information and give everyone the opportunity to get together and exchange ideas.
• Be sure to compliment a job well done. Morale plays a bigger part than people think in affecting safety, productivity and job satisfaction.
• Do a wrap-up. Reinforce the important points brought out during the meeting. Be sure to reflect on examples of the CORRECT products, tools, equipment and usage as the last impression.
• Thank your staff for their interest and enthusiasm.
• Ask the participants to print and sign their names on the form at the end of the toolbox talk. This will help you track who has received the training.

HOW TO GIVE A TOOLBOX TALK
• Keep it informal.
• Even though you may be using a written toolbox talk and other resources, use your own words in making the actual presentation.
• For effective and rewarding results, do what’s comfortable for you.
• Use visual examples. There’s something to be said for “seeing is believing.”
• Whenever possible, use actual equipment to illustrate your points.
  ◦ If you’re talking about ladders, have one handy so that you can point out such things as loose rungs or split side rails.
  ◦ If you plan to talk about the danger of using patched up hand tools, show a few samples. Consider a chisel with a mushroomed head or a hammer with a taped handle.
• Invite people to participate. The purpose of any toolbox talk is to get people to think about safety problems.
• Make the talk a hands-on session. Have your people name hazards and what to do about them. Encourage them to offer suggestions to improve safety. When asking questions, use open-ended questions instead of questions that require only a yes or no answer. Listen to your employees and find out if further training is needed.

THE PLACE AND TIME
• Hold the meeting in your work area first thing in the morning or immediately after lunch when the workday will least be interrupted and the work area is relatively quiet.
• Hold a toolbox meeting once a week to reinforce your company’s philosophy that job safety is important.
• Toolbox talks will help you in the daily operations of your business. Keep them handy. Like any tool, they can’t help unless you use them.