

# ***Thar She Blows, Lads***

*About the only people that really like high winds are wind surfers, and sailboat owners. Well, maybe kite flyers do, too, but that's about it. As for construction, it only brings problems, job shutdowns, collapsed walls, and trouble in general. Watch the barometer, folks.*

***In Construction, wind and weather*** have a dramatic control over what we do day to day. Heavy rains shut down most projects for at least one day, and sometimes two or three, especially if we find our equipment bogging down in two- to three-foot ruts.

***And ice and snow aren't very welcomed either.*** Snow slows us down, but ice is a real killer, in more ways than one. Ice, on slopes, walk boards, scaffolding, ramps, concrete pads, means dozens and dozens of situations where workers are slipping and sliding all day long. And, just like a flu epidemic, falls tend to develop into wholesale broken ankles, twisted knees, strained backs, collar bone fractures and big-time loss-day incidents.

***But along comes high winds,*** and all bets are off. High winds come from out of nowhere, when we least expect them, and walls start tumbling, cranes overturn, sheets of plywood go flying, and tarps are all over the place . . . sometimes covering the windshields of dump-truck drivers, equipment operators, and workers in general.

***What can we do to anticipate high winds?*** Many contractors have barometers on their jobsites, as well as high/low temperature gauges. Construction foremen and supervisors become weather advisory experts, and can easily anticipate foul weather on the horizon.

***When wind gusts from 30 to 50 miles per hour,*** bad things happen. Tower cranes are at risk, as are heavy-duty cranes, where gusts can pull their loads to one side of the crane boom, causing slings and chokers to separate, dropping tons and tons of material/equipment onto the ground... and sometimes on top of the crane itself.

***Work trailers, even those tied to the ground*** with heavy-duty strapping, sometimes completely overturn in high winds, or wind shears. Part of the problem with work trailers is that they have so much flat surface that the winds just blow the trailer over on its side.

***And then there are tornadoes*** that come sweeping across the plains, destroying everything in their path. Tornadoes are sometimes horrifying in the damage they can create in one or two minutes.

***So what can we do on our jobsites*** to minimize hazards, destruction, injury, and sometimes death? Using an old seaman's adage, we can "batten down the hatches." Get debris off roofs, get plywood down on the ground, and add additional diagonal struts to structures that are in the "framing" stage.

***Even small objects*** like 2-gallon gas cans can become projectiles in high winds, rolling across parking lots, or paved surfaces, and can go through thin walls, window panes, causing all sorts of damage, as well as personal injury to the unwary.

**Batten down the hatches, lads,** and try some of the following:

- **Get cans/containers, ladders, plywood, etc.,** off all roof tops, even one-story buildings.
- **Shut down tower-crane** operations when the winds start threatening. Sometimes it takes a tower-crane operator over ten- to fifteen-minutes to get down from his ten- to twenty-story perch.
- **Shut down all crane operations** immediately. When the boom starts to sway or the tie lines pull people off the ground, something bad is about to happen.
- **Storage sheds** will fare better if the doors are securely shut/fastened.
- **Put trash barrels** behind buildings/sheds/trailers. There's a better chance that they won't become airborne if there is something to deflect the winds.
- **Roofing materials** stored on roofs are sometimes the first thing to get blown off rooftops. If possible, get them down to ground level.
- **Extension ladders** and even step-ladders, should be laid flat on the ground.
- **De-energize overhead powerlines,** or at least be aware that they may be blown down. In high winds, and workers should be warned not to touch lines found lying at ground level.
- **Flying glass** can pierce eyes, skulls, bodies, everything. Place duct tape over all glass panes so the hazard will be reduced.
- **Scaffolding** is a prime candidate for wind damage, so walk boards and other tools/materials stored on scaffolds should be brought to the ground.
- **Get a quantity of sump pumps** (and hoses) to the jobsite, anticipating that high winds are usually followed by heavy rains. Heavy rains will result in trenches being filled (or saturated), and the result will be trench collapses within six to ten hours.
- **If shafts/pits/tunnels** get filled with water, they too must be pumped dry so the sidewalls are not affected.
- **Phone lines** usually are blown to the ground because they're fastened to somewhat flimsy 4x4 uprights, that are usually only two or three feet in the ground. And, watch those overhead power lines.
- **Lightning** sometimes accompanies high winds and rain. With the ground saturated with water, the entire construction site (mud and water) can be a massive "conduit".
- **Storm drains** will probably be overflowing, carrying with them entire sections of storm drain pipe, throat inlets, piping, materials, tools, vehicles.

*So, my sea-faring friends, rain/wind/lightning/thunder are the prophets of doom and gloom, property damage, destruction, injury, and sometimes death. Batten down those hatches at the first sound/report of high winds and storms.*