

## **Plumbing Safety**

A plumber installs, repairs, and maintains plumbing fixtures or systems. Duties may include installation and repair of pipes, fittings, and fixtures servicing the water supply, waste disposal, and heating systems. Plumbers must also haul supplies, cut and assemble plumbing materials, and use equipment and tools.

Chemical and material exposures are common, so make sure that you get training on the potential hazards in the areas you are assigned. Utilize material safety data sheets (MSDS) when working with new chemicals to familiarize yourself with their chemical properties, health hazards, and the required personal protective equipment (PPE) that you will need. Remember to avoid exposure to sewage by wearing gloves, coveralls, washing your hands, and decontaminating your equipment after you use it.

Plumbing work areas are not always easy to access or work in, so pay attention to confined spaces and follow confined space procedures if you have to enter one. Avoid oxygen deficient atmospheres and be aware that hydrogen sulfide (a sewage decomposition byproduct) can build up to unhealthy levels. If necessary, have someone from EH&S check the air quality.

Plumbing work is done in wet environments, so wear the appropriate footwear to avoid slips, trips, and falls. You can get burns from hot equipment parts, steam lines, and the release of hot water or steam, so use heat-insulating gloves and eye/face shields and make sure to drain pipes before you open them up.

To avoid electric shock, only use power tools that are safe for a wet environment and that have a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI). Be cautious when working on metal pipes; if you ever feel any tingling when touching a metal pipe, stop work immediately!

When working in awkward positions or performing repetitive manual tasks, you are at risk for a musculoskeletal disorder. In order to avoid that, make sure to use proper lifting techniques and keep your back straight while working. Try to rotate your tasks to give your body a break.