

Handling aluminium safely within construction

Aluminium is used for a host of applications in building and construction and is often the material of choice for rolling blinds, doors, exterior cladding and roofing, wall panels and complete prefabricated buildings to name a few. Aluminium is used due to its brilliant properties, such as its long service life as well as being non-combustible and energy efficient. Due to this, it is great for use in structures because it is reliable, resistant, and stable.

Aluminium is also light weight, which makes it easier to transport and handle on-site, reducing the risk of work-related injury. However, construction workers should still be mindful of handling and transporting the metal with care. Here are several tips to using aluminium safely within construction.

Fabricate in a safe factory environment

The manufacturing process should be carried out in a controlled factory environment. Machinery and equipment used to create aluminium panels, such as high-pressure rollers, have a major risk of serious injury or fatality if not carefully controlled. A robust and safe isolation policy must be in place with well-considered lockout tagout in place to ensure confirmed de-energisation is completed before and maintenance or cleaning work commences. Padlock and key cabinets from Reece Safety ensure that lockout keys and padlocks are accounted for and available to safely lockout and tagout mechanical equipment after use.

Regardless of the panel's size, it should be cared for with suitable protection such as low tack tape so that it is protected during transportation to the construction site. Careful protection will also keep the panels safe on site until they are ready to be used within the construction process.

Transport with care

Although they may not be heavy, aluminium sheets or panels are often fabricated to specific sizes, either to suit market needs or made specifically for a build project, so transporting the material safely needs several pairs of hands to ensure that the aluminium does not scrape against hard or sharp surfaces. Two people should be used when moving or stacking panels to avoid dragging or throwing them across one another. It is important that a worker waits for another team member to become available before moving aluminium sheets to avoid distortion or damage.

Storing aluminium

Aluminium panels should be stored horizontally with card or packers underneath each one to protect the individual surface finishes and prevent accidental twisting or warping. Each panel has a powder coated surface, so avoid dragging them off a pallet. If there

is only room to store the panels vertically, invest in a storage rack to keep each panel safely secured. Working with panels of different sizes should mean that the largest are stored at the bottom working up to the smallest on top until needed for the construction project.

Installing aluminium

Installation and delivery of aluminium components should be delayed until the last moment to avoid accidental staining and/or damage, however schedules may not always allow this. Often, newly installed components will need cleaning due to residue from nearby

work procedures - this can be avoided by protecting aluminium surfaces with a clear lacquer or light oil.

If the aluminium is stained or damaged with a wet product, it should be removed before drying and washed thoroughly with water. If materials have splashed onto the aluminium and dried, such as

plaster or paint, it needs to be removed from aluminium by scraping, use a plastic or wooden scraper - a metal scraper will damage the reflective surface and shiny finish of the aluminium. ■