

Special to Safety & Health

Gravity Works in Any Language

While the Roofers and Waterproofers Research and Education Joint Trust and the Roofers International Union continue to develop fall awareness materials, the CPWR has been working on a ladder safety campaign with Hollywood. CPWR – The Center for Construction Research and Training – has been working with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and Hollywood Health & Society on a construction safety storyline about a worker who suffers a ladder fall for a show on Telemundo/NBC, the Spanish-language network.

Starting April 1, “Pecados Ajenos” (“The Sins of Others”) introduced viewers to Tere (short for Teresa) and her boyfriend, Ramón, who begin working on a construction site. Tere loses her balance on a ladder when a paintbrush slips from her hand, and she falls backward. Viewers see the fall’s consequences – mounting hospital bills and workers’ frustrations with the contractor. While Tere is lucky and survives, her life changes.

The show’s characters find out injuries – and deaths – on construction sites are preventable. Following safety procedures is the key. In the TV show Tere, who has little training, decides not to tie off the ladder when a harried coworker tells her that it will take too much time. “Besides,” he tells her, “nothing will happen.” She later regrets her decision to ignore the little training she had.



“Pecados Ajenos” characters Ramon and Tere at work on a construction site. CPWR, NIOSH and others worked with Telemundo to create a construction safety storyline airing the month of April.

That simple storyline was born through months of labor among the partner organizations. Don Ellenberger, a CPWR training director fluent in Spanish, gave scenarios to the show’s writer about how a worker might fall from a ladder. Weighing the locations available in Miami where the show takes place and is filmed, the screenwriter chose a fall while painting. CPWR worked with the Miami BTC president to secure a location and found a trainer in the Painters Union in Miami to serve as an on-site technical advisor to make the construction scenes look realistic.

CPWR and its partner organizations wanted to capitalize on this unique opportunity to educate viewers about construction hazards. CPWR created a public service announcement that shows Tere’s fall and features Julio Ocampo, who plays Ramón. Ocampo reinforces the safety message “injuries can be prevented,” and tells viewers to go to www.MiTrabajoSeguro.com (My Safe Worksite). CPWR created this web site in Spanish with partner organizations to give visitors easy-to-understand safety tips on ladder use. Site users can print the information and also email it to friends. The site also has links to comprehensive construction safety and health sites in Spanish.

Although the site focuses only on ladder safety right now, CPWR and NIOSH plan to expand the information to many other worksite hazards, yet keep the easy presentation style and text with plenty of photos or drawings.

As Ocampo says, safety tips should be read and followed “For your fellow workers. For your family. For you.”