

National Youth Safety Essay Scholarship Contest Winner

Savannah Branch

West Brunswick High School

My name is Savannah Branch. I will be a 2019 graduate of West Brunswick High School in Shallotte, NC. After my high school graduation, I plan to attend Barton College in Wilson, NC to study Health Sciences and Pre-Physical Therapy as well as play softball for the Barton Lady Bulldogs. I was first introduced to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration during my PLTW class (Project Lead the Way) of my sophomore year of high school. My teacher, Sheila Gerald, gave a presentation regarding our future, potential jobs and the precautions of staying safe in the workplace. She presented to us one of the OSHA courses that would give us an advantage when it came to applying for a job. This course was the 10-hour OSHA General Industry Safety and Health course. Little did I know that taking this course would open my eyes to workplace hazards around me including the recent work being done in my own neighborhood.

My community and surrounding areas were recently hit by one of the most powerful hurricanes to date, Hurricane Florence. This storm caused devastating damage to many homes and businesses. Hurricane Florence also brought a great deal of construction work to our area which is still going on to this day. With the help of the 10-hour OSHA course, I was able to observe and determine whether the crews were taking appropriate safety precautions or not.

Along with my community, my home was also severely impacted by Hurricane Florence. Our roof suffered major damage resulting in the replacement of the entire structure. The construction took place just a few days ago. As I was home, I observed several safety precautions being taken. My home has a very steep pitch roof. Due to how steep the roof was, the workers wore harnesses to prevent them from falling and causing serious injury. There was also a grounds crew that walked around every so often to pick up any debris that the roofers were removing from the roof or that fell off the roof inadvertently such as damaged shingles, nails, hammers, and scrapers. I found this to be extremely important because one of the best ways to be safe is to have a clean workspace. From my observation, the crew wore the appropriate gear for their jobs, such as gloves. This helped to protect them when picking up dangerous debris as it helped to prevent the sharp items from puncturing their skin. They also wore boots with a protective gripping that helped prevent them from slipping while on the roof as well as on the ground. My parents and I also took our own precautions while being around the workers and the construction site. We made sure to park our vehicles a safe distance away from the work site so that we would not run over any debris that the grounds crew may have missed when picking up any discarded construction items. We also made sure to watch where we walked to prevent from stepping on anything that could harm us such as a roofing nail or sharp roof flashing.

In addition to my roof, our crawlspace underneath our home was also damaged from Hurricane Florence. As a result of the enormous amount of rainfall that fell during the storm, our crawlspace flooded causing all of the insulation and HVAC ductwork to get wet and mold began to form. To prevent further mold, my family along with the help of a professional company had to remove all of the insulation from under our house. I noticed some safety precautions were not taken. For example, not all of the individuals wore protective masks to prevent breathing in toxins from the air. Some did not wear protective clothing causing them to be completely covered in wet insulation. I also observed that some individuals did not wear appropriate shoes to help them move through the wet mud. I noticed these problems, along with my mom so we went to the hardware store to purchase safety supplies along with some masks and appropriate clothing for them to wear.

I know some of these safety measures seem self-explanatory, but it is surprising to me how many times people will overlook them and risk their own health and safety. If it was not for the OSHA course I have taken, I would not have the valuable knowledge of understanding how dangerous and unsafe certain workplaces and environments can be as well as how to protect myself. The OSHA training helps me to quickly notice hazards and gives me the tools and skills to be able to protect myself and the people and places around me. The lessons I learned through this course will continue to show me ways to be safe and keep other people safe.