

MANAGEMENT SAFETY NEWSLETTER

SELF INSURED WORKER'S COMPENSATION FUND MEMBERS

MAY 2016

Are your workers becoming complacent? Help them refocus on safety

When you put an effective safety program in place -- one that eliminates as many hazards as possible, substitutes safer alternatives when available, and uses engineering controls to minimize other hazards -- your workers can start to think of the workplace as "safe." And when people feel safe, what happens? They might let their guard down.

In the workplace, that can be a deadly mistake.

What can you do to keep workers from relaxing their guard in ways that put them and their coworkers at risk? How can you fight complacency in your workplace?

Practice Tip

Encouraging workers to help identify and report hazards and near misses is another way to keep them focused on doing the job safely.



Attention and focus

Complacency is, at its heart, a failure of attention. Attention is a tricky thing to command. We can really pay attention to only one thing at a time --humans, studies show, don't actually multitask. We switch our attention from one thing to another rapidly, but we don't truly pay attention to more than one thing at a time.

A worker who has become complacent may let his or her attention wander from the most important thing, the task at hand, to some other topic. So how can you get workers to focus on the thing that is actually the most important at any given time?

Management Articles

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Making a difference in 2016

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Help your workers fight complacency by:

Eliminating distractions. Some distractions are easy to identify and relatively easy to control. The distraction of texting while driving can be eliminated, at least during work hours, by implementing policies that require workers to put their phones away and just drive while behind the wheel.

Other distractions are harder to identify and harder to control. A worker who's distracted because he's in the middle of a nasty divorce may not even talk about his personal situation at work. But if that's the reason he's not paying attention to what he's doing, it could end up being the reason somebody gets hurt.

A Near Miss Today - Is an Accident Waiting To Happen Tomorrow

Managing change with care.

If you're changing or upgrading your processes and procedures, keep workers in the loop. A worker who thinks he or she knows how to do a job safely may -- if not paying close attention -- miss changes. If the worker keeps doing things the old way, it could cause problems.

When you're making improvements in how you do things, keep lines of communication open with your workers. Let them know that doing things the way they did before won't work anymore.

Maintaining an awareness of variables. A job that's safe in December might end in a case of heat illness in July. A job that's no problem outdoors could turn toxic indoors, where hazardous vapors can accumulate.

Workers need to understand that when they're at work, they need to be at work - fully present, focused on the job. Tell them that not all distractions are pocket-sized and electronic; anytime workers are distracted, they should take enough time to get their heads together before someone gets hurt.

Taking your safety program to the next level. How many days have you gone without a lost-time accident? That number may be impressive, but how many days have you gone without a recordable accident, property-damage incident, or a near miss? Don't rest on your laurels--and don't let workers rest on theirs. If you've met one goal, celebrate! And then set a new goal, before workers begin to think there's no more work to do and they can relax.

Make sure workers pay attention not only to the parts of a job task that don't change but also to the hazards that change depending on location, season, staffing, and other variables. If something's different from how they learned it or when they last did it, they may need to stop and do a new hazard evaluation.

Finding a new angle. How's your training program? Are you still running everybody through the same program that worked so well when you first implemented it? If workers get nothing new out of your training program, they may decide they "know it all already" and let down their guard.

Make sure your training program is up to date with respect to your facility, your personnel, regulatory requirements, and current technology, and highlight any changes for workers. The new angle that catches their interest and shows them they don't already know everything there is to know about a topic might keep them focused and safe.



TAKE CARE AND BE AWARE