

Monthly Safety Theme Workplace Distractions

Workplace Distractions Can be Dangerous!



“Unsafe acts often appear atop the list of workplace accident causes. It’s a very general term – and there are many factors that can lead workers to do something that endangers their health & safety. They might take shortcuts, fail to wear proper personal protective equipment, or lack complete training for the task at hand.

They might also have their attention diverted in one or more ways that can result in fatalities, injuries and lost productivity.

Personal Issues

There are numerous reasons why individuals can be below-par mentally. They could be stressed by family or financial problems, physical ailments that aren’t serious enough to keep them off the job, or they might even be daydreaming happily about some person or upcoming event.

Poor Air Quality

Dust, fumes and chemical contaminants can cause a variety of physical symptoms that affect an individual’s ability to focus fully on his or her job. The working environment also might be too hot or too cold, the result of inadequate heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC).



Boredom

Doing the same thing day in and day out can put someone’s brain in neutral to the point where they ignore safety rules.

Clutter

A messy workstation, whether in an office, or on an assembly line or in a warehouse, can both create and hide hazards. What you don’t see can hurt you – and poor house-keeping also can say a lot about your attitude toward safety, quality and production.

Chaotic Surroundings

Clattering machinery, constantly ringing telephones, loud conversations and people rushing in all directions can interfere with a worker’s performance and attention to correct procedures.

Long Hair

Believe it, this can be a distraction. When hair is loose and flowing, it might obstruct your view and divert your attention. Avoid fixing hair or attending to other personal grooming when operating machinery or a vehicle. Tie your hair back and keep it under a hat if possible.

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Noise

Sudden or repetitive loud noises, or even no sounds at all, can be a serious distraction. There are legislated limits to tolerable workplace noise. When these are exceeded, hearing protection becomes necessary. Wearing such devices can also be a problem though, because they can limit ability to hear things that should be heard.



Fatigue

Acute fatigue results from short-term sleep loss or short periods of heavy physical or mental work. Although there is disagreement on how increased fatigue or sleepiness contributes directly to accidents, it is generally considered to have a negative impact on work performance. The effects of fatigue are of short duration and usually can be reversed by sleep and relaxation.

Co-workers

Interruption by fellow employees, whether work-related or for personal chatter, should be kept to a minimum. It not only can waste time but also divert attention from doing things safely. It is often a good idea to actually stop what you are doing, even shut down equipment, while the conversation (as brief as you can make it) continues.

Workmates and other potential distractions might be impossible to eliminate, but as with any risk to health and safety, their effects need to be analyzed carefully and appropriate action taken. Sometimes this can be done on a personal level; sometimes it will require policy changes, enforcement or physical alterations by management.

Electronic Devices

Technology has brought numerous potential distractions: trying to use several devices at once; using them while you should focus only on one major task (driving a vehicle being among the prime examples); or listening to music and being oblivious to what's going on around you. Computers, cell phones, iPads and the like all can be very useful, but their use should be specific – in function, time and place.

It Really Happened:

The section manager arrived and while he was parking his vehicle, two loaded dump trucks approached the staging area. One truck waited as the driver of the second reversed towards the landing to unload.

After leaving his vehicle, the manager walked across the landing to check the height of settlement gauges. While walking, he made a call on his mobile phone. Meanwhile, the truck was still reversing and the backup alarm was sounding normally. The driver was in visual contact with the spotter through his side view mirror. The spotter briefly turned away to check something, and at the same time the manager crossed behind him into the path of the truck. The spotter didn't notice him. Still talking on the phone, the manager stopped with his back to the truck, unaware it was backing right up behind him. The truck's rear tires snagged his leg and pulled him under. He later died from his injuries.

While many workplaces have written safe work procedures and policies restricting or defining phone use, these may not go far enough. Effective control measures must consider how workers can become distracted while using a mobile phone and the implication of this for safety.

At a construction site, sections of land were being preloaded with sand & gravel.



West Fraser