



Clamp Down on Workplace Safety Complacency

Every year on average, 32,000 people in the US and about 2,075 in Canada die in motor vehicle crashes. Yet no one thinks that they could be the next victim. We put our seat belts on, shift our cars into gear and fully expect to get to our destinations safely, even as we engage in distractions ranging from fiddling with the car stereo to engaging in cell phone conversations.



Trip after trip, year after year, people get away with complacent behavior behind the wheel and elsewhere, until the one time that we are jarred out of our autopilot mentality by something we never saw coming, because we weren't looking for it. Case in point: How many drivers have been involved in a cell phone conversation and driven straight into the back of a vehicle that has stopped in traffic?

Complacency goes far beyond becoming too comfortable with driving. It is a major cause of close calls, injuries and fatalities in the workplace. Complacency often manifests itself in shortcuts - workers skipping steps in a procedure because they are rushing, bored or lazy. Workers can get away with taking shortcuts hundreds or even thousands of times, before the one time that they can't. A pair of safety glasses is hanging from the operator's equipment cab 10 feet away, while the worker screams in agony as a sharp piece of metal embeds itself into an eye.

Lifelong consequences occur as a result of saving the two seconds it would have taken to pick up and use protective eyewear.

Another danger of complacency is that it is contagious. If other workers see co-workers taking shortcuts, they will emulate these unsafe behaviors. And if supervisors stand by and allow unsafe behaviors to flourish, your workers will get the message that your company or organization doesn't really care about safety. All the safety meetings and safety-first procedures in the world will mean nothing if supervisors aren't seen to be walking their safety talk.

While you can't know what your workers are thinking, you can observe them for signs of complacency, such as:

- Not using required PPE.
- Unsafe use of equipment, such as standing on the top rung of a ladder that is too short for the task.
- Skipping steps that should be performed to ensure safety and quality.
- Operating a forklift recklessly without regard for the safety of others.
- As a supervisor, it is important to nip complacency in the bud by having a chat with workers about unsafe behaviors and the risks that they are assuming. They must be warned that such behaviors aren't acceptable and they will face discipline for further breaches of safety rules.

Here are some other things you can do to combat safety complacency:

- ✓ Practice what you preach. Be a role model. If your workers observe you working unsafely or taking shortcuts, what message does that send to them?
- ✓ Engage all workers in reporting unsafe conditions or close calls. Quickly respond to all concerns and during your safety meetings, mention safety issues that have been raised and what has been done to address them.
- ✓ Encourage your workers to watch out for one another and say something to co-workers they observe working unsafely or taking shortcuts. These interactions should be respectful, expressing concern for the other person's safety.
- ✓ Encourage your workers to plan ahead before starting any task. They need to think about what could go wrong and how to protect themselves against workplace hazards.
- ✓ Encourage workers to share their ideas for safety improvements during safety meetings.

Be Safe!