Being Observant Safety Meeting Kit



WHAT'S AT STAKE

There is so much noise and distraction in the world around us. Whether it is at home or at work, we have so much on our minds as well as things going on around us that we miss a lot of important details. It is critical to slow down and be able to observe the environment around you while are at work to be able to safely perform tasks.

WHAT' S THE DANGER

Loss of attention control can be a significant contributing factor in common injuries. When people are on the move in their job (or at home), blindly operating on "automatic pilot" is only effective when situations are unchanging. The continuing process of perceiving and making needed adjustments is critical to injury prevention when there are changing conditions – weather, traffic, and personal risk factors.

People rarely get hurt because they want to, because they don't care, or are clumsy. All too often, the inability to control attention and attitude can be an insidious contributing factor in many injuries.

Depending on what is preoccupying our mind, our emotions, the distractions around us, the noise levels in our area, etc. will determine how much of our ability to be observant is affected. The less able we are to be observant, the higher our chances are to be injured on the job by a unrecognized hazard.

THE ROLE OF ATTENTION

- Slips, trips and falls are often attributed to slippery or object-strewn work surfaces, but experience shows that loss of attention is often in play. Environmental distractions or mental preoccupations can easily arrest attention.
- Many injuries where people run into or are impacted by a moving or a stationary object involve lack of attention. Have you ever known someone who was dwelling on a concern or making long-term plans while walking, then slammed into a wall, corner, desk or other object that "just appeared out of nowhere?"
- Disregarding weaknesses or low-level pains can lead to minor problems becoming major ones. The potential for soft-tissue injury increases when people are unable to monitor their internal cues of tension, balance, or if they are unaware of the direction of forces within their body when lifting, pushing, pulling, using tools and other daily activities.
- Hand injuries are often associated with workers performing highly repetitive, often high-speed tasks; it's easy for them to be lulled into complacency.

Lacking awareness of one’s surroundings places employees in high-risk exposure situations that can lead to safety incidents, such as:

- Being distracted by loud noises or coworkers
- Taking one’s eyes off the road while driving
- Multitasking
- Rushing to complete a task
- Working while fatigued or extremely tired
- Working at a new job site

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Survey your work area before performing any tasks

- Ensure that you have enough space to do your work
- Identify energy sources that require lockout/tagout procedures
- Look for hazards in your work area such as: low-hanging overhead objects, sharp edges or surfaces, standing water, exposed wiring, unguarded equipment, general work environment conditions
- Make sure that all safety devices on your equipment are in good working order before use
- Discuss work status and potential hazards with coworkers in your area and/or the person you are replacing at shift change prior to starting any work

Think before you act:

- Before starting any task, be sure that you know the correct procedure to complete the job, have the correct PPE, and understand the present hazards of performing the task.
- Be aware of your body position and hands in relation to machinery, equipment, and other objects. Adjust, minimize, or slow your movements as required by your work environment to avoid contact with objects. Always walk behind moving equipment when possible, never obstruct your vision by overloading moving equipment, and use extra caution around corners and doorways.
- When transporting materials, walk the route you will be taking prior to moving anything. Look for obstacles such as uneven surfaces, trip hazards, objects you will need to maneuver around, and foot traffic.
- Don’t create additional hazards – avoid running extension cords through high foot traffic areas, don’t block exits or regularly used pathways and clean up once you complete a task or your shift (tools, debris, replace machine guards, electrical covers, etc.).
- Consider how many coworkers will be in your work area when you perform a task.
- Put up barriers and signage to warn others to avoid dangers in your work area.
- Don’t become complacent. Employees who are too comfortable with their work surroundings may begin to overlook potential hazards.

FINAL WORD

Injuries can be prevented inattention to surroundings and being distracted can lead to injury, as does faulty equipment, lack of proper training, improper behavior by workers, or lack of workplace assessments and housekeeping.