

# The Daily Safety Focus – A Series of Daily Tool Box Talks for Construction

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## January 2014 Daily Safety Focus



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## January 2014 Morning Safety Topics

- January – 2..... Job Briefings
- January – 3..... Working Together
- January – 6..... Stay Safe at the Wheel
- January – 7..... Neatness Does Count
- January – 8..... Foul Weather Driving
- January – 9..... Learn from Near Accidents
- January – 10..... On Your Own Time
- January – 13..... Staying Safe with Portable Ladders
- January – 14..... Oh, Say, Can You See?
- January – 15..... Backing Up Safely
- January – 16..... Protect Your Back
- January – 17..... Almost an Accident—Be Warned
- January – 20..... Treat That Cut or Scrape!
- January – 21..... Coping with Stress
- January – 22..... Circle of Safety
- January – 23..... Defensive Driving
- January – 24..... Acting Our Age
- January – 25..... Sprains and Strains
- January – 28..... Bad Housekeeping Is Kid Stuff
- January – 29..... Keeping Fit at Any Age
- January – 30..... Employee Incident Reporting
- January – 31..... \*\*\*Your Choice - Any Previous TBT

# The Daily Safety Focus – A Series of Daily Tool Box Talks for Construction

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## Job Briefings

January 2

Job briefings are not only an important aspect of our daily work habits, they are also mandated through OSHA. In 29CFR1910.269 (c) it states, we the employer shall ensure that the employee in charge conducts, a job briefing with the employees involved before they start each job. You noticed it said each job and not just at the beginning of each day.

The only time just one daily job briefing is needed, is when all the jobs are similar in nature. This would pertain to production workers on an assembly line. In our line of work there are no two jobs that are similar.

Our company policy states, that whenever it becomes necessary to replace the person in charge and/or a worker during an on going job, a new briefing must be conducted. It also goes on to state that, if the status of a job changes, work is temporarily stopped, or unexpected conditions arise a new job briefing is required. It is also important that everyone on that job is involved in this briefing. This can be found in the accident prevention handbook, section 105.

The following Five Steps are to be utilized in each briefing, no matter if you're working alone or in a group.

1. All Hazard Associated with the job. This includes all hazards physical, mechanical & natural.
2. Work procedures involved, proper tools needed, clearances, hold offs, what each individual will be doing and where they will be doing it from, etc.
3. Any special precautions or unique situations particular to that job, any mechanical limitations etc.
4. Energy source controls, proper tagging, grounding, clearances etc. Clear and concise communications with dispatch.
5. Proper PPE, safety glasses, hard hats, face shields, rubber gloves, etc. Is any special PPE's required for this particular job?

# The Daily Safety Focus – A Series of Daily Tool Box Talks for Construction

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## WORKING TOGETHER

January 3

Have you ever wondered who writes the rules? The safety rules, that is? Has it ever occurred to you that maybe those people who wrote the rules just don't have a clue as to what's really going on out in the field, or out in the plant or in the world for that matter?

Well let's take a look at these people who wrote the rules: It was the guy we've all heard about who cut two of his fingers off after he wired up the guard on a circular saw. He was helped by the machinist who didn't have the time to go back to the lunch room for her safety glasses and lost an eye when the bit broke in the drill press. They both got advice from the fellow who had his head split open by a falling hammer because he just plain didn't like to wear hard hats.

I think you get my point here. If not, then let me put it another way: Each and every safety rule came about because someone was hurt, maimed or killed. Their misfortune contributed to our knowledge of how accidents happen and how to avoid them. Rules came into being in order to help you avoid a similar accident or injury.

Your company is very interested in your safety. It has provided you with the tools, equipment and working conditions that will help you do your best. But in return, the company expects certain thing from you. It expects your cooperation in abiding by the rules, in assisting your fellow workers with a willing attitude, by helping your foreman by following their instructions and by your valuable comments and suggestions. It also looks for your cooperation by maintaining your physical fitness to perform your job, by not showing up sick or under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and by getting the proper rest at night.

By cooperation or working together with your company, a win-win situation is created that benefits everyone involved. The most obvious benefit is a safer and more productive work place. A somewhat less obvious, and some would mistakenly say a selfish or greedy benefit, would be more money for the company. Let's take a look at this "money" benefit.

There is no doubt that if a safer and more productive work place is created, then the company stands to make more money. There is less down time due to accidents, insurance rates decrease, operating cost are lower and profits are up. But what happens when profits go up? The company becomes more competitive. It can now sell its products, be it through construction or manufacturing, for less. Being more competitive means more work for you, more tangible benefits like profit sharing, or raises, paid vacations, holidays. Simply put, healthy employees insure a healthy company and a healthy company means happy employees.

So you see, safety rules benefit everyone. By working together with your company and fellow employees to ensure a safe working environment, you are, in many ways, ensuring your own physical and financial well being. It is not just a tired old phrase to say SAFETY FIRST. In fact it's the only phrase that makes sense when it comes to getting the job done, on time, under budget and, most importantly, a happier, healthier you when it's complete.

# The Daily Safety Focus – A Series of Daily Tool Box Talks for Construction

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Stay Safe at the Wheel

January 6

The first rule of driving is safety. Whether driving for your employer or for yourself, never take chances that may prove to be unsafe. If there are passengers in your vehicle, don't forget, you are responsible for their lives as well as your own. Stay calm and alert while you are at the wheel. If you become sleepy or don't feel well while driving, pull over and stop at the first available chance. Courtesy while driving is another name for safe behavior. In addition to having a respect for others on the road, obey the speed limit and all other laws. Allow plenty of distance between your car and other vehicles and always signal your intentions at the appropriate moments. If a tailgater tries to force you to speed up, slow down and let that vehicle pass. Most importantly, remember: alcohol and driving do not mix. Neither do, drugs and driving—including medication that may make you sleepy. If you are in an intoxicated condition or even in an emotional state that will affect your judgment—such as extreme anger—never, get in on the driver's side of the car.

While driving in a normal state, however, there are still hazards that may be difficult to negotiate.

Here are a few fairly common emergency situations and how you can handle them:

- If your brakes should fail when you try to use them, stay calm. Pump the pedal; this may restore the brake. If it does not, you can use the parking brake, but don't jam it too hard because if your wheels are turned this can cause a spin. You can also try downshifting to slow the car. If all else fails and the situation is extreme, sideswipe a curb, guardrail or some other stationery object, rather than hitting another car head on.
- A collision with an oncoming vehicle is one of the most dangerous types of accidents you can have. Your best chances of survival are in dodging to the right. Even if you will hit something along the road or another car going your way you are more likely to survive than in a head-on crash.
- Another frightening possibility when driving is that your accelerator might get stuck. If this occurs, you should try to unstick the pedal by pulling up with the toe of your shoe. Sometimes tapping the accelerator quickly will do the trick. Do not take your eyes off the road to try to free the accelerator. If the pedal doesn't release, shift into neutral or press down on the clutch. Pull over, stop, and shut off the ignition. When ever this situation starts to occur get the vehicle into a mechanic to fix the problem it will not go away by itself.
- Blowouts are a pretty common type of vehicular accident. If a front tire should blow out, the car will pull to the side that the blowout is on. You need to steer against the pull. Don't put on the brake. Instead, hang on to the wheel and try to stay in your lane. Slow down a little at a time and pull off the road.
- If you are forced off the road into deep water, escape through the window as quickly as possible. If power windows have short-circuited and you are stuck inside, try the door. Keep pushing against water pressure until water begins to fill the compartment and the pressure equalizes. The door will then be easier to open.
- Everyone has stories about going into a skid, particularly in nasty weather. In this situation, never put your foot on the brake. Instead, take your foot off the gas and turn the wheel into the skid if you have a rear wheel drive vehicle, if you have a front wheel drive slow down until the wheel grab. This will let you regain control. Be ready, during nasty weather for the unexpected.

# The Daily Safety Focus – A Series of Daily Tool Box Talks for Construction

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## Neatness Does Count

January 7

Good housekeeping is at least as essential in the workplace as it is in your own home. When your workspace is clean, orderly, and free of obstructions, you can get the job done safely and properly. A messy work area, on the other hand, promotes accidents because it hides hazards. These hidden hazards can cause you and others illness and injury. Don't accept the sight of paper, debris, and spills as a normal working condition. If you consider this as normal you may begin to think of worse dangers as acceptable and normal as well.

Effective housekeeping takes an ongoing effort, not just hit-and-miss attempts to clean up once in a while. Periodic cleanups aren't enough to reduce workplace accident rates. Don't begin a drive to clean up and then let things slide after a week or two. Set your work area in order and keep it that way. A lasting result is the only meaningful one.

While we are not expected to clean up for others unless that is the job we have been hired for, as adults we can help clean up after ourselves and keep our own work area neat and in order. That is an understood part of our job description. (On the other hand, it would not be very adult and goes against the safety culture to notice a hazardous situation and do nothing about.)

Here are some specifics to be mindful of.

- Keep the floor around you clean and clear of waste. If your job is one in which debris is created, you can attend to the immediate floor area every once in a while as you work.
- Keep your workstation cleared of personal items such as clothing and lunch boxes. These should be stacked neatly in a locker or an assigned storage spot.
- Keep stairways, passages, and gangways free of obstructions. Don't place materials on the stairs or in aisles as you work. Bundle hoses and cables when not in use.
- Be aware of protruding nails, sharp corners, open cabinet drawers, and trailing electric wires in the work area. Either correct the unsafe condition if you are able and it is safe to do so, or notify the person responsible for overall maintenance of the space that something should be done.
- Wipe up spills as soon as they occur. Use proper procedures as described in the material safety data sheet if the substance is a hazardous one and put on any personal protective equipment that is required. Dispose of used rags or towels in the proper manner.
- Keep your tools and equipment clean and in good shape. If equipment is damaged, report it and follow up to make sure that the equipment has been fixed before using it again. After finishing a job, place tools and unused materials in the spot where they belong.

Good housekeeping is also an important part of fire prevention. Make sure that you don't keep more combustible and flammable materials at your workstation than you need for the job at hand—and keep these liquids in safety cans. Place oily or greasy rags in metal containers. Place all other trash and scrap in the receptacles provided for them. Don't reach into waste containers—dump trash into another container or remove the bag.

It is also your responsibility to smoke only in designated areas, if you must smoke at all—and to dispose of matches and butts in the receptacles provided.

Let working in an orderly fashion become second nature to you. It is one of the most important ingredients in doing things right and keeping yourself and others safe on the job.

# The Daily Safety Focus – A Series of Daily Tool Box Talks for Construction

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## Foul Weather Driving

January 8

Bad weather affects all roads. Our interstate system is a marvelous example of modern engineering, but no matter how good the road is; it is dangerous when there is sleet, snow, or ice on the roadway. Speeds must be reduced on slippery roads.

When road conditions are slippery, drivers must look farther ahead so they can anticipate emergencies and avoid the need for sudden maneuvers. Last-second stops and turns cause the most skids on slippery pavements.

Extra care must be taken on hills. Brake over the top of blind hills at a speed that will permit you to bring your vehicle to a stop in case the highway isn't clear ahead. On a downgrade, both loss of traction and gravity are working against you.

Don't attempt to drive around or through a scene where other vehicles have obviously had trouble with the road conditions. The same conditions that caused their trouble may still be there when you arrive. When there is no room to get through, you must be prepared to stop.

During the winter months, snow- and ice-covered parking lots are prevalent. Good drivers will allow more clearance between their vehicles and fixed objects when maneuvering on bad surfaces. A pile of snow or an ice rut may throw vehicles off just enough to cause them to strike a stationary object if not enough clearance has been allowed.

Drivers of vehicles with air brakes must take care to protect their air supply in freezing weather. Brakeline freeze can be annoying and dangerous. Many newer trucks are equipped with synthetic airlines, so the old solution of melting the ice with a fuse or torch is no longer a quick solution. If the vehicle is not equipped with an air dryer or other means of automatically expelling water and other contaminants from air tanks, the driver must take the time to manually drain the air tanks every day.

The lighting systems of vehicles become especially important during the winter months. Nights are longer, and visibility is often reduced by bad weather. Electrical systems are winter-sensitive. Approximately 80 percent of all light bulb failure are due to environmental reasons. Drivers must inspect their lights more often during the winter and clean them when necessary so they can see and be seen by other highway users.

Foul weather driving is much more strenuous. Drivers need proper rest before every trip, and while enroute, fresh air helps keep drivers alert. An open window is an old safety practice, and it helps drivers hear what is going on around their vehicles.

After all precautions are taken and good practices are followed, there still will be occasions when conditions become too hazardous to proceed. Good drivers will pull off the road at the first safe place, and wait until conditions improve before continuing.

# The Daily Safety Focus – A Series of Daily Tool Box Talks for Construction

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## Learn from Near Accidents

January 9

When you notice a red light glowing on the dashboard of your car, you recognize it as a warning, to let you know that there's a problem.

A near accident is a warning too: For example, when you're driving down the highway at a good clip and another car pulls out in front of you, it's necessary to hit the brakes or execute a quick maneuver to avoid an accident.

Chances are that you'll be pretty hot under the collar at the other driver's action, but if you're smart, you won't let anger overpower your safe driving habits. You'll also make a mental note to be more alert and watch for car's approaching the highway from side roads. This could save your life next time.

A near accident in the workplace is a warning or an indication that something is wrong. Perhaps a machine isn't operating correctly, or materials aren't stacked properly, or someone has acted in an unsafe way. Close calls or near accidents on the job should also be converted into safety precautions.

Let's consider some typical accidents that could have been avoided if the close-call warning had been heeded.

- An employee tripped over a discarded piece of two-by-four and fractured an ankle.
- A worker slipped on some trash laying on the ground and grabbed a cabinet in an attempt to break the fall, pulling the cabinet over on top of her.

\*Suggestion: Using real examples from your own operation can have great impact.

It's fairly certain that the proper handling of earlier near accidents could have prevented the real thing from happening in these cases. The two-by-four, loose tile and trash on the floor had probably caused other employees to step aside to avoid tripping or may even have caused stumbles that didn't result in injury.

Chances are, there were several, yet in ths cases and doubtless in many others no one heeded the warnings. Nothing was done to correct the situations, and accidents resulted.

We can't go through life depending on luck to keep us healthy. We have to make our own luck, as the saying goes—by acting in a safe manner and taking proper precautions.



# The Daily Safety Focus – A Series of Daily Tool Box Talks for Construction

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An actual accident isn't hard to remember. You may still have the pains or scars to remind you. Someone burned, as a child doesn't need a slap on the wrist to

promote caution thereafter. But as we've noted, a near accident is often forgotten, with no benefits resulting from the experience.

How can we turn a close call into a contribution to safety? First, recognize it as a warning. Next, correct the situation, or remove the hazard, that caused the near accident. If it can be handled routinely, do so. We need to keep these same situations or hazards from arising at some other time or place.

Constant safety awareness on everyone's part is the most important factor in accident prevention. It's what makes us recognize a close call as a warning. So what do you do when a stack of boxes tips over, the handle on a tool snaps, or a ladder slips and, fortunately, no one is hurt? After taking a moment to feel thankful, you take action to prevent what could be a harmful accident next time.

# The Daily Safety Focus – A Series of Daily Tool Box Talks for Construction

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## On Your Own Time

January 10

Safety is important not just to you and your family but to your employer as well. It's part of my job to help you to develop a safe attitude, so that safety will become an ingrained part of your job, day in and day out.

But off-the-job safety is important, too. What you do on your own time is your own business, but since we're all part of a team, it's only natural that we're concerned about each other's welfare both on and off the job.

At work, you're part of a safety network that extends into many areas. There are rules and regulations to follow and supervisors who work at keeping the safety program going.

Off the job, though, you're on your own. You can leave safety glasses off when you're remodeling the kitchen, and you can balance a ladder on a box when you're painting the peaks on your house.

You probably wouldn't hear a word out of anyone, but it would take a pretty immature person to deliberately leave safety at work. Still, there are times when we all get a little careless.

The highways are prime areas of concern for safety away from work, since vehicle-related accidents are the prime cause of fatalities, on the job and off—in the home or public place. I won't attempt to go into all the aspects of traffic safety here.

They're emphasized almost everywhere, and we've had training sessions devoted to vehicle safety. But I certainly caution you to cool it on the road. Be patient getting out of the parking lot, and always watch the other driver.

To some degree, most of us are do-it-yourselfers around the home, and this is where a lot of people are injured. Be careful when using a ladder, for example, being sure it's in good condition and you climb safely.

When using tools, pick the right tool for the job. If a tool is in poor condition, don't use it. Most of you have power tools, and you should be sure that they're properly grounded with a three-pronged plug or double insulation. And stay off wet surfaces when using electric power tools.

The weather is something we can't do much about. Yet it affects our safety, so we have to take precautions against it. Don't overexert yourself when shoveling snow, for example—a shovelful can weigh more than you may think. And don't work too long in the hot sun. This can catch up with you fast, particularly if you've worked hard all week at your regular job.

Off-the-job safety should really be second nature if you practice it in earnest at work. So keep an eye out for hazards whether you're on the golf course, in your boat, or driving your snowmobile.

# The Daily Safety Focus – A Series of Daily Tool Box Talks for Construction

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National statistics show that accidents away from work account for 70 percent of all deaths and 55 percent of all injuries to workers. So the toll in suffering and the loss in manpower runs high away from the job.

You are all valuable employees, and each of you fits into our overall operation and the overall manpower picture in the country. Your contribution to the economy would be difficult to replace if you were injured either on or off the job. Add to this the fact that you're priceless to your family, and it's easy to see why a 24-hour safety effort is necessary.

# The Daily Safety Focus – A Series of Daily Tool Box Talks for Construction

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## Staying Safe with Portable Ladders January 13

Portable ladders are a simple and effective means for safe climbing except for one major problem. Workers sometimes find portable ladders so easy to use that they neglect normal precautions and safety rules. The result, too often, is an accident.

Almost all ladder accidents can be avoided by following the three basic rules of ladder safety:

No ladder is safe unless it is the right type and right size for the job

No ladder is safe if it is missing rungs, if its rungs or rails are defective, if it is poorly built, or if it is in a weakened condition

3. No ladder is safe unless the person using it takes commonsense precautions.

Using the right type of ladder makes the job safer. For example, don't use a stepladder to do the job of a straight ladder by leaning it against a support.

Heavy construction jobs call for a heavy ladder not a light household type. Metal ladders must not be used in the vicinity of exposed electrical circuits or power lines, where they may come in contact.

The right length is important, too—neither too long or too short. Stepladders are safest if they're 10 feet or less in length, and they should never be longer than 20 feet. In construction work, extension ladders can be used to reach up to 44 feet, but, for greater heights, scaffolds should be used. Splicing two ladders together is never safe.

A ladder should always be examined before it is used to be sure there are no defects that make it unsafe to use. (The reason a ladder should never be painted is that the paint could conceal significant defects.)

A ladder is unsafe to use if side rails are cracked or split or if there are sharp edges or splinters on cleats, rungs, or side rails. Check also for missing, broken, or weakened cleats, rungs, or treads by placing the ladder flat on the ground and walking on it. If a defective ladder cannot be repaired, it should be disposed of promptly and permanently.

Once the ladder has been checked and found safe, set it at an angle of about 75° with the floor or ground. The distance from the wall to the foot of the ladder should be about equal to 1/4 of the ladder's total length.

After setting the ladder in place, check it for firm and level footing. To prevent slipping, non-slip points or safety shoes are recommended. But, if this is not practical, the ladder should be secured firmly by lashing it with rope or some other suitable line.

The ordinary straight ladder is not built to support more than one person at a time. In going up or down, always face the ladder and grasp the side rails with both hands.

Never carry tools or materials in your hands when going up or down the ladder. Instead, put them in a sack that hangs from a strap over your shoulder or use a bucket and rope to raise and lower them.

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Don't lean a ladder against an object that might move, and never lean it against a window sash. If you must work near or on a window, fasten a board securely across the top of the ladder to give a bearing on each side of the window.

Always stay below the top three rungs. You should hold on with one hand while working.

Be sure you keep moving the ladder as needed to reach new areas to be worked. Never overreach, push, or pull the ladder while working on it. Never straddle the space between the ladder and another object or try to work in a high wind. Any of these actions could upset you and the ladder.

If you're working in front of a door that opens toward the ladder, the door must be blocked open, locked, or guarded. In any other situation in which a person or vehicle may bump into the ladder, get a helper to stand guard. If you can't, then be sure to rope off the space around the ladder.

Some points to remember:

- Always inspect a ladder before using it.
- Outdoors, don't work on a ladder if it's very windy.
- When going up or down, face the ladder. Don't hurry. Take one step at a time, and hold on with at least one hand.
- Don't overreach or try to reposition the ladder while you're on it. Instead, get down and move the ladder to a better working position.
- Don't stand and work on any of the top three rungs of a ladder.
- Secure the ladder against slipping before you try to use it.
- Don't ever use a metal ladder near live wires or parts.
- When a wooden ladder, is not in use, store it under cover, horizontally, with supports to prevent sagging. Don't let it lie on the ground where heat or dampness may weaken it.

# The Daily Safety Focus – A Series of Daily Tool Box Talks for Construction

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## Oh, Say, Can You See? January 14

We all know that eyesight is precious and that life without it can be tragic. But somehow, it is difficult for people to realize that destroyed or damaged vision is not something that happens only to other people. It can happen to you—as quick as a wink—and so eye protection is not something to gamble on.

Thousands of men and women have lost one eye, or both, while performing some operation—either on the job or at home—that they considered safe enough without eye protection. Flying nails, broken bits of glass or tools, splashing chemicals, particles of abrasive dust—these are among the many substances that have stolen people's sight.

Many years ago, it was common to see a worker wearing a black patch to cover an empty eye socket. When glass eyes were developed, they began to be seen more frequently than patches. As they became more realistic looking, they improved the person's appearance but no longer served as a warning about the vulnerability of one's eyes.

Nowadays, eye patches are a rare sight and often indicate only an infection or some minor injury, such as a scratch, that will heal without permanent damage to the eye. Glass eyes, too, are seen less often since rules were passed requiring eye protection to be provided and worn on the job when a potential hazard is present.

And make no mistake about it the hazards have not disappeared along with the patches. They are still here and still a serious threat. That's why we continue to deliver the message, so that none of us will have the sad experience of those who neglected to protect their irreplaceable eyes.

Safety glasses will never do the job they were intended to do if they are raised up on a forehead, hanging around the neck, tucked into a pocket or lying in a toolbox or inside the cab of a truck. When some damaging object or substance comes flying toward the eyes, it's too late to make a grab for safety glasses or a face shield. And when your sight is destroyed, it's gone forever. There are no spare parts to replace it. Sure, you can still get a look-alike eye—but not a see-alike eye.

Can you see why we continue to stress the importance of wearing your eye protection, and why our discipline policy will be applied to those who refuse to guard their eyesight with the protection provided?

# The Daily Safety Focus – A Series of Daily Tool Box Talks for Construction

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## Backing Up Safely

January 15

Some members of the animal kingdom are able to see what's going on behind them without turning their heads. The human animal can't do that. Therefore, we face an extra challenge when we have to drive in reverse. Most backing-up accidents occur at speeds under five miles per hour. But they still result in significant damage to vehicles and other property, may even cause serious injury, and are sure to wreck the driver's safety record. Reviewing and following safe backing practices can reduce such accidents. I have a list of 12. How many do you know and practice?

1. **Plan and drive your routes to avoid backing wherever possible.** This may mean a few extra steps to get from the vehicle to the worksite, but walking is good for you.
2. If you pass the place you are looking for, beware of drifting back. Your slow progress when looking for the right address might be the reason that the car behind you pulled up so close. If you have a clear view of what is behind, check the mirror, turn around, and then put the vehicle in reverse. If there is a remote possibility of a blind spot, get out and look before you have an accident.
3. When obligated to back up, make absolutely sure there is nothing behind, and then back up immediately. Do not look and then wait for a while before backing up, because conditions could change.
4. Use all mirrors when backing—right, left, rear, and the overhead too if there is one. You can't see any of the mirrors if you are hanging out of the driver's door to see what is behind you. Besides, you could damage the door if it strikes an object.
5. If it is necessary to back up some distance, travel slowly and stop part way, then get out and check your safe progress.
6. If you are driving a big truck, and there is help available to assist you in backing, **use it.** Have the guide stand to the side and give a hand/arm signal because a vocal signal may not be heard. Never let the guide get directly behind the truck. If that does happen, stop until the guide is alongside. Remember that safe backing up is still your responsibility as the driver, even if you have a guide.
7. **Park where you will not have to back up to get out of a parking spot.** Always pull away from a parking place in forward gear, if possible.
8. If you miss your turn at an intersection, don't back around a corner to change direction. Instead, drive on and around the block. The extra few minutes might save someone else's car from damage.
9. If you have to park in a driveway, back in if possible, so that when leaving, you can drive forward rather than backing into the street.
10. When backing over a sidewalk and into a street, stop at the sidewalk and make sure there are no small children playing close by. Stop again at the curb to make a last check on traffic before backing into the street.
11. Remember that, when backing, a turn of the steering wheel turns the front of the vehicle in the opposite direction. While backing, the front wheels should be in line with the back wheels until objects on each side have cleared the front bumper.
12. Before backing into an unfamiliar area, get out and look for stakes, holes, and sharp objects.

These commonsense precautions came from assorted drivers with good safety records after driving many miles—both forward and backward.

# The Daily Safety Focus – A Series of Daily Tool Box Talks for Construction

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## Protect Your Back

January 16

One out of every five workers in this country who is hurt and off the job for a day or more has a back problem. One out of every five workers who becomes disabled because of a work-related injury is the victim of a problem back. Because these numbers are so high, it's important for us to discuss how to keep your back healthy and strong.

Back maintenance begins off the job. Your back is a full-time worker, involved in all your daily activities and requiring 24-hour-a-day attention. A good diet and moderate exercise, including gentle stretching of your legs and back and toning of the stomach muscles, are important in keeping your back free of pain. But watch out if you are just starting on a regimen of stomach exercises. Don't strain your back trying to stay in shape. Keep your lower back against the floor while doing sit-ups and don't pull from your neck—pull from the stomach.

Sleep is another important off-the-job activity that has a lot to do with your back's comfort. A too-soft mattress can cause you pain when you wake up, so can sleeping on your stomach; don't do it. Lying on your side is the easiest posture for your back to take, but lying on your back is okay, too. Small pillows can help as well when placed in stress spots such as under or between the knees.

A lot of lifting is done off the job as well as on. Don't forget, for instance, that children can be heavy. When picking up a child, bend your knees. When lifting a garage door, bend your knees. When taking groceries out of the trunk, put one foot on the bumper to get closer to the load.

When driving, sit with your back against the seat, legs bent, and with knees higher than the seat. If your vehicle has a lumbar support use it.

When you are on the job, of course, you will have to be doubly careful if you do work that may strain your back. It's important that you know and respect your limitations. Don't try to convince yourself that you are a superhero. Don't lift loads that are too heavy for you. And, consider: The weight of the load itself may not be too much for you, but the number of times you have to lift similar loads may make it too heavy. Although you may be able to lift 30 or 40 pounds easily, if you have to lift all day, the top weight should be about 14 pounds.

How much you can lift without injury also has to do with how far away from your body you have to lift. A worker who lifts parts over a workbench to put them on a conveyor two feet away may only be able to lift a five-pound load without back damage. Know your limits and give yourself a break. Allow your body to tell you when it is being stressed. If you're used to carrying 30 pounds of lead, you may not understand why carrying 30 pounds of a bulky substance can be much more difficult. But it is more difficult, so let your back decide not your mind.



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In some instances, you may need equipment to help you lift a load. Or, in other cases, you may have to ask someone else on the job to give you a hand. Go ahead and ask. Get help. If you don't get help today for five minutes, that other person may have to do your job—and his or hers—for the five days you are out with a back strain. Don't let that happen.

Of course, as you know, there is a right way to lift so you don't hurt your back. Most importantly, don't twist at the waist when lifting or carrying a load. Instead, move your feet to turn your body. Be sure of a firm grip on the load—which you have first checked to make sure there are no sharp edges or nails. Don't lift or carry the load to one side of your body—use both hands.

Never lift from an unbalanced posture. Don't lift from one knee for instance. Watch your footing. Make sure the bundle you carry isn't blocking your view.

To stay healthy and strong, eat well, exercise, rest, and use good judgment. That way, you can keep the 400 muscles, 1,000 tendons, 31 pairs of nerves, and 33 vertebrae of your back pain-free and in working order.

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## Almost an Accident—Be Warned

January 17

How many times have you come close to having an accident, shrugged it off as a near miss, and gone on your merry way without giving it another thought? I want all of you to give it thought.

Many times, the difference between a near miss and an accident is just a fraction of a second in timing or a fraction of an inch in distance. Next time, the difference may not be there.

Near misses are warnings of accidents in the making. If we accept the warnings and look for the causes, we may be able to prevent similar situations from developing.

Let's say you're going up a gangplank onto a bridge footer. Your foot slips, but you're young, agile, fast, and empty-handed. So you regain your balance with no harm done. The reactions of the next person to come along are a little slower than you were. Then comes the third worker—just as fast as the first two but unable to maneuver because he's carrying a heavy load. He slips and falls off the plank with the load on top of him. How seriously he's injured is a matter of luck—perhaps only scratches, but maybe a broken ankle or rib or neck! Now the loose cleat, sand, mud, or ice is discovered, and the condition is corrected. But it's like locking the garage after the motorcycle is stolen. Two people saw the thief but didn't recognize what was happening, so didn't report anything.

There are a few accidents that occur without some advance warning—and that is what a near miss is. If we heed that warning and check into the hazard, most accidents can be eliminated. So, I want all of you to keep your eyes open for those advance warnings. Don't shrug off the near misses as only close calls; find out why they happened and what corrective action is needed.

Don't take unnecessary chances or ignore warnings, and don't think, "it can't happen to me." It can happen to you if you don't take precautions to protect yourself.

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## Treat That Cut or Scrape!

January 20

Small cuts and abrasions can be the start of something big, so they shouldn't be ignored. They require immediate attention. The shelves of drugstores and supermarkets are loaded with a variety of bandages and other first-aid items, so it's surprising how many people still get infections from untreated wounds. Most of us know of cases in which someone has had blood poisoning that resulted from only a scratch. Despite this knowledge, the tendency is still to let small cuts go without treatment.

But when infection takes over and keeps you off the job, the act of not treating the cut seems pretty stupid. For instance:

- An employee of a concrete company skinned a knuckle, then missed two weeks of work because of blood poisoning.
- Another worker cut a finger on a grinding machine and had to miss several weeks of work because of blood poisoning.
- A car wash attendant lost five weeks of work after failing to treat the knuckles skinned on a bumper.

It's hard to visualize the number of germs, some of them deadly, that are often on our skin and on the things we work with. These germs are just waiting to find an opening in the skin to enter the body and start trouble. Tetanus and blood poisoning, are two of the most common killers that enter the body through small, harmless-looking cuts. Other serious infections may result in the amputation of a finger or hand.

If treating a small cut still seems like a lot of bother, try not getting injured in the first place. Wear work gloves to protect your hands from cut hazards when handling materials. Maintaining a clean and clutter-free work area is another way to avoid injuries. But when a cut occurs, treat them right away. Don't wait until break time or until you get home. Time is really an important factor.

Here are a few tips from the American Medical Association on the care of minor cuts and abrasions:

- Never put your mouth over a wound. The mouth harbors germs that could infect the wound.
- Do not breathe on the wound.
- Do not allow fingers, used handkerchiefs, or other soiled materials to touch the cut.
- Immediately cleanse the wound and surrounding skin with soap and warm water, wiping away from the wound.
- Hold a sterile pad firmly over the wound until the bleeding stops.
- Replace the sterile pad and bandage as necessary to keep them clean and dry.

Maybe there were some surprises for you in this advice—such as not putting your mouth on the cut or breathing on it. In any case, the emphasis is on immediate cleansing of the cut or abrasion. Use of antiseptics should generally be left to the advice of a doctor or other health professional.

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## Coping with Stress

January 21

You're an adult. You can take the frustrations and difficulties of everyday life. Well, sure, but let's admit that sometimes in our complex world troubles pile up and even the most generally capable and confident person becomes keyed up, nervous, and "stressed out."

Being in a tense state never solved anything. In fact, it often makes things worse: We may lose our normal resiliency and view ordinary events as potential threats. We may become distracted and have accidents.

How do we escape the gloom and anxiety and return to our more pleasant and productive existence? It's just a matter of throwing off some of the stress that accumulates and learning how to relax rather than remaining a chronic worrier. Much of what we feel as mental or emotional stress is actually tension in our bodies. Our jaws are clamped, our necks and shoulders are tied in knots, and our stomachs may be churning. That's because our thoughts are sending the message throughout the body: "Something is up. Get ready for trouble." Even if things aren't actually so bad, the body is prepared to fight or run for its survival. How about trying a little experiment with that clenched jaw. All together, now: clench. Now loosen just a little—we're not really clenching a lifeline in our teeth. The first thing we now find happening is that our breathing deepens just a little bit. And if we don't allow the body to tighten back up, we might start to relax. Our stomachs will relax somewhat while filling up with breath. The intake of air is what's really needed for survival, not a constant, tense state of readiness to flee or do battle.

While there are no miracle methods to make us relax, our breathing is a very significant key. The more we allow our breath to fill the spaces in the body as nature intended, the more relaxed we will be. Try slowing your breath and allowing your stomach and then your chest to expand. That type of breathing is something that children do naturally, but that adults, sometimes forget or ignore—unless they're athletes or opera singers!

Inhaling and exhaling properly is a basic, but here are a few more tips that will help you relieve stress and relax.

- Get enough sleep and rest. Sleep is a great cure for tension, refreshing your entire body. Make time for sleep. You're not going to miss anything. Lack of sleep will make you cranky and can even cause you to be accident-prone—which could mean missing a lot.
- Take time out to play. Schedule a "mental health break" if only for an hour or two once or twice a week. Take a walk around the block, go to the park, or go fishing. Do whatever you find the most fun, preferably an activity that is not competitive.
- Make an effort to eat sensibly. Forget the caffeine and junk food. Remember fruits and vegetables? They even make great snacks.
- Don't bottle up your feelings. If your feelings have been hurt or you are angry, acknowledge it to yourself and also let a friend you can trust know what's going on with you. Bad feelings that aren't expressed don't just go away; they

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fester and become hard to manage. Speaking about them when they occur really helps.

- Don't try to be perfect. Human beings aren't machines. Perfect is just an idea in your mind; doing your best should be more than enough. Lighten up on yourself.
- Do something for others. Stop arguing with life and begin agreeing with it. Give someone a helping hand, some useful advice, or deserved praise. It's amazing how much better you'll feel.

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## Circle of Safety

January 22

Before you get into a company vehicle, you are required to do a circle of safety. How good is the circle of safety you do? Do you just go through the motions? You only do it when someone's watching? Or are you that conscious individual who takes vehicle safety seriously. Only you can answer that question. Let's take a look at what a circle of safety is all about and how to perform one.

As you know when you park a vehicle for any length of time, anything could and usually does happen. That is why a circle of safety is so important. During the circle of safety we are looking for anything that could be leaking from the vehicle. You're looking for anything unusual. You Check tires for any slices or parts missing on the wheel hubs. This would prevent anything unexpected while your driving down the road.

When you get to the back of the vehicle you need to look at the loaded material. Make sure all material is secured and will not fall off the truck and hit another vehicle while traveling down a road. While you're back there check the rear lights, making sure there are working and not cracked. Look all around, what's in the general vicinity, any special conditions, ice or slippery pavement etc? Look around do you see any unusual terrain, potholes, snow banks, hidden traps, oddly parked vehicles, low tree limb, children present, etc. Make a mental note of anything unusual that you do find.

While you walk around the vehicle, check the bin doors making sure they are secured and the latches work properly, look at the windows, are they clean and not cracked? Are the fire extinguisher and first aid kits current? Anything found on the vehicle that needs to be fixed must be addressed prior to that vehicle leaving the spot it is in.

A circle of safety must be done prior to moving any vehicle that has been parked for length of time. The circle of safety should encompass everything on the vehicle along with anything around it. Remember you are responsible for the safety of that vehicle and those around it once you get behind the driver's wheel.

Can you think of the times that you didn't do a proper circle of safety and what could have happened if something was left out of place on the vehicle? Or something was wrong with the tires? Had a fire or injury and you didn't have the proper extinguisher or first aid kit?

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## Defensive Driving

January 23

When you're at the controls of any vehicle, it is important to remember that defensive driving is a full-time job. The most dangerous mile you have to drive is the one directly ahead of you. Anyone can drive perfectly for 10 feet or 100 feet or even one mile, but it takes a real professional to drive perfectly for 10,000 miles or more. To be a professional driver there are many things you must observe and practice.

A safe driver is not merely someone who has been lucky enough to avoid accidents, but is one who drives defensively and looks out for others. Today's driving standards demand skill, knowledge, and decision-making ability.

Drivers who are safety-conscious have developed good habits and practice them daily. Every time they get behind the wheel, their driving records are on the line. We must drive like professionals and be prepared mentally and physically.

If you are a driver who has a safe attitude about your driving, you will be able to drive with a sense of security in inclement weather, on difficult roads, and through heavy traffic.

In addition, to be a good driver you should respect all traffic laws and be courteous to others. Don't be in a big hurry—that's just asking for trouble. When bad weather affects driving conditions, you must adjust your driving time and habits. Driving on a wet or slippery road is not the same as driving on dry surfaces. The number of traffic accidents and cars running off the road during rainy weather could be reduced if drivers would anticipate the slippery road conditions and adjust their driving habits.

Stay a safe distance from the vehicle in front of you—one vehicle length for each 10-mph. Start stopping sooner. Apply your brakes the instant you see a hazard developing, but apply them gradually so you don't go into a spin or grind to a stop so quickly that you risk a rear-end collision.

**Defensive driving is driving to prevent accidents**, in spite of the incorrect actions of others or adverse weather conditions. Anticipate driving hazards and know how to protect yourself from them. Be alert while driving, by keeping your mind free of distractions and your attention focused on driving; alertness involves watching and recognizing accident-causing factors instantly. The professional driver has foresight, the ability to size up traffic situations as far ahead as possible. The driver must anticipate traffic problems that are likely to develop and decide whether these developments could be dangerous.

Many drivers fail to understand why they were given a "preventable" for an accident when they were not legally at fault. A "preventable accident" is one in which you fail to do everything you could have done to prevent it. Even though the driver cited with a "preventable accident" did not violate any traffic laws, the professional driver should have seen or anticipated the incorrect actions of the other driver in time to take actions to prevent the accident from happening. However, you may also see the valuable lessons that near-misses offer and make the necessary adjustments in your driving habits.

As a defensive driver you must operate your vehicle in a manner to avoid contributing to an accident or being involved in an accident. Awareness of the vehicle's limitations is essential.

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## Acting Our Age

January 24

Have some of you—those who are kissing your thirties goodbye—noticed that they are building stairs steeper these days? Or that it's a longer run from your house to the car?

I've noticed it, and have figured out that maybe the trouble is I am not as young as I used to be. Just possibly that is the trouble with me and you—and not that the stairs are really steeper or the distances longer.

The doctors claim that when we put on a few years, we ought to start "acting our age." That does not mean we are ready for the wheelchair, but it does mean we have to use our heads a little more and our muscles a little less.

We can still do plenty of work, even heavy work, if we are in a normal, healthy middle age. But some of the faster, rougher, harder kinds of exercise are hard for us to take and hard on our hearts and systems generally. And there are some other things, we used to get away with that play hob with us now. Like eating big meals of rich food, and throwing down too many drinks, and sitting up all night to shoot the breeze, outwit a deck of cards, or goggle at celebrities on the late TV shows.

I am not trying to preach a sermon, or tell you how to run your life. It's not my responsibility how you act off the job. But I do have an interest in keeping you around the job and seeing that you keep on drawing a paycheck for doing a good day's work.

So I feel obliged to give out some advice, especially since this advice is based on what doctors say is right for workers our age. They say, take it easy, get a little extra sleep, and give a little extra thought to your eating and drinking habits. Leave the house in time to get to work without running, and when you are going upstairs, walk, don't run.

When there is a nice weekend, you can enjoy a lot of sports, and be good at them, without trying to be a champion weight lifter, sprinter, or tennis ace.

If you come back from a weekend or vacations feeling all dragged out, chances are you tried to subtract 10 years from your life in your habits of exercise. If you do that often enough you will cut 10 years off—but off the wrong end.

One last point: If you have not had a checkup from a doctor lately, get one. Let him or her check over your weight, your ticker, your blood pressure, and whatever else needs looking at. Checkups like that often catch trouble before it gets serious, and that may mean several extra years of useful and enjoyable life for you.

Me, I want a chance to cash in on some of my social security and my pension. I want some days in the sun a few years from now. And I figure that if I want those things, I am going to have to "act my age" from now on. How about you?



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## Sprains and Strains

January 25

Athletes in training know their abilities and their limitations, because going beyond them leads to strained and sprained muscles and ligaments. Those injuries could put the athlete out of competition.

If your job involves considerable physical exertion, you also need to be aware of how much you can do safely; so as to avoid any injury that could put you on the bench for a while.

Sprains and strains can occur anywhere—in the workplace, during recreational and sporting events, and at home. A sprain occurs whenever a muscle is stretched beyond its limit. Muscles can do a great deal of work, but they must be conditioned. A worker who is accustomed to manually handling a large number of pieces of material in a given workday can do so with ease. Those of us who have different duties would find it difficult to do that same amount of work without paying for it with aching muscles. If we should continue to do the work, however, we would soon be conditioned and be able to perform the job without pain. However, even the conditioned athlete or worker cannot exceed the limitations of the muscles. When a muscle is stretched too much, the ligaments pull and sometimes even tear. Stretched ligaments and tendons are termed strains. A sprain is when tearing has occurred.

The industrial setting provides many opportunities for sprains and strains to occur; the most common is material handling. We all handle material in one way or another. Even the office worker is involved with material handling when picking up a package, box, or chair to move it. Other movements can also cause sprains and strains—overreaching or overextending a part of the body; reaching over something to pick up a load; or trying to reach a top shelf without using a proper stool or ladder. What can we do to minimize these injuries? Well, this meeting is a beginning. If we understand what causes sprains and strains, we are better equipped to prevent them. A few basic rules to remember are:

1. Understand your limitations. Don't charge into a job cold. Warm up to it. Take a lesson from athletes—try to keep yourself in good condition and at your proper weight.
2. Don't overextend yourself—use a stepstool or a ladder when necessary, and avoid a fall as well as a strain.
3. Lift with your legs, not with your back. Keep the load close. Don't twist your body while carrying a load.
4. Be sure there are no slipping or tripping hazards in your work area or around your home. The sudden jerk caused by a slip or trip can cause a strain or sprain.
5. Look into ways to eliminate lifting and carrying or to keep it to a minimum. Is there a better way—a way to let some piece equipment do most of the job? Wheelbarrows were invented for just such a purpose, and wheeled luggage is a more contemporary example.

Work smarter, not harder: it's easier and safer.

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## Bad Housekeeping Is Kid Stuff

January 28

I'm sure just about all of you are familiar with the stage play and television show "The Odd Couple." If you haven't seen the show, at least you've heard about it. Probably not too many of you really identify with Felix Unger, who makes such a big deal out of housekeeping. On the other hand, many do have at least some empathy with Oscar Madison.

Although he's depicted as an overgrown slob, with housekeeping the furthest thing from his mind, some see him as just a perennial teenager—and perhaps some consider him an admirably free spirit.

Those of you with children can remember or look forward to their teen years, when you sometimes wondered just what was on their minds—it certainly wasn't housekeeping. Others of you may have that messy phase "to look forward to," possibly with dread, since it seems to go with age.

What does this have to do with the work environment? Actually, a great deal. Housekeeping is a very important part of efficiency, safety, and cost control.

Imagine that you are hosting a visitor who is new to the company or new to the area. You want the public areas of your establishment to be a showcase—neat and clean, and perhaps displaying samples of your best work to impress the visitor with your abilities.

This is a sensible approach, because a visitor who notes dingy windows, and unattended spill, trash that didn't quite make it to the waste-bin, and other evidence of sloppy housekeeping may think twice about our organization. That's because a cluttered and disorganized workplace tends to suggest immaturity or poor organization skills, and leads to doubts about the quality and reliability of the work itself.

Just as housekeeping can reveal a lot about the overall character of a business, it can also say a lot for what a company thinks about safety, because poor housekeeping allows a variety of hazards to "lie in wait for" an unwary worker. In any successful safety program, safety gets its equal share of management attention along with production schedules, quality, cost, etc. And good housekeeping furthers the achievement of those goals, whereas poor housekeeping works against them.

So your attention to housekeeping contributes to your own and your co-workers' safety—and also to the efficiency and success of the business. That should be powerful motivation, because your own job is only as secure as your company is sound and its business profitable.

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## Keeping Fit at Any Age

January 29

Wellness is not just the opposite of sickness; it's a way of life that shows you care enough about yourself to stay healthy. Good living habits can:

- Prevent illnesses
- Reduce medical bills
- Make you feel more energetic so that you can participate in activities after work
- Help you live a longer, happier life

Illness can result from too much smoking, drinking, junk foods, caffeine, and stress, and not enough exercise, rest, and good nutrition.

A good means of working against bad habits is to start a good habit—exercise! This can be done at any age. Exercise will help you keep your weight down without strict dieting, reduce stress and tension, and lessen your use of cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs.

It will also strengthen your heart, muscles, and bones, increase your energy level, and help you sleep more soundly.

You don't have to be an athlete to exercise. Walking is one of the best exercises you can do. You can walk almost anywhere, and no expensive special equipment is required.

Try to walk outdoors in good weather, as the sunshine and fresh air will add even more benefits to the exercise. Don't think about problems at work or home, and try to find something new during every walk (a plant, a bird, a display in a store window) to keep up your interest even if you always walk the same route.

Walking with your spouse or a friend makes the time go by more quickly and pleasantly.

Light weights assist with your toning when used with repetitive motions. There are books and videos available to help you design the best program for you.

Start light and work your way up to heavier weights.

You might also enjoy team sports if your company or the local recreation department offers them. There are slow-pitch softball and over-40 basketball and volleyball teams that will allow you to play at an enjoyable level. Or you might prefer more solitary sports like swimming or biking.

To get the greatest benefits and the fewest strains from exercising:

- Consult with your doctor before starting, especially if you have a chronic condition.
- Warm up before each session by stretching slowly.
- Build up your exercise time to at least 20 minutes per session 3 to 5 times per week.
- Don't overdo it. You should be able to feel you have worked your unused muscles but **not** be in pain or agony.
- Cool down after exercise with more stretching or a less exerting exercise after each session.

While it won't happen overnight, a program of exercise and more healthful living (without those bad habits) will make you look better, perform better at work, feel better, sleep better—and live longer.

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## Employee Incident Reporting January 30

An incident is similar to an accident except that it does not necessarily result in injury or damage. No matter how trivial they are, incidents should be reported to supervision just as accidents are. Employees should be encouraged and periodically reminded about the importance of reporting incidents, or as they are frequently called, near misses. I am giving you just such a reminder right now. Nothing is learned from unreported incidents. Hazards, causes, and contributing circumstances are lost if not reported. Employees who don't take the time to report near misses they are involved in may not learn from them. The fact that many incidents come within inches of being disabling injury accidents makes failing to report them all the more serious.

When incidents are not reported, their causes usually go uncorrected. That means they may happen again, perhaps producing tomorrow's disabling injury or fatality. This can be illustrated by the case of the worker who slipped on a floor made slippery by a small leak in a hydraulic line. He did not suffer any injury. Two days later, when the line was still leaking, another employee slipped on the liquid, fell, and broke her leg. At that point the first employee told the company investigating the accident about his own previous near miss. Had he reported it promptly, chances are the defective hydraulic line would have been repaired before the accident happened.

There are many reasons why a worker might choose not to report an incident in which he or she was involved. All of these are understandable, but we should recognize that none of them are acceptable when we realize why the report should have been made.

What are some of the reasons workers don't report incidents? Probably the most common is failure to understand the importance of reporting and the harm that could result by not doing so. Here are some others that we've heard about:

- Fear of the supervisor's disapproval.
- Not wanting the incident on their work records.
- Dislike for the red tape involved.
- Reluctance to spoil the unit's safety record.
- Not wanting to be the subject of an incident investigation.

What Can Be Learned from an Incident?

The whole purpose of reporting—and investigating—a near-miss incident is to find ways of making sure the same elements that were present on that occasion don't result in an accident at some future time. So here are some of the questions to which answers must be sought:

- What were the circumstances surrounding the near miss? Was there a hazard that the employee should have been aware of?
- Is there a safety rule covering the situation? If so, did the almost-victim know it? If there isn't such a rule, should there be one?
- Were any safety devices, clothing, or equipment used improperly or not used at all when they were called for?
- Have there been other near misses of the same type?

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The answers should suggest ways to prevent a recurrence. Perhaps there needs to be new rules or procedures developed. Or maybe more thorough training is required. In any case, the reporting of the incident is the vital first step.