

Wellness @Work

Spring 2014

Avoiding Hazardous Workplace Distractions

Every employee wishes for a job where they receive training and personal protection equipment that ultimately shields them against all hazards in their workplace.

But the best training and state-of-the-art PPE is useless if workers ignore a major culprit in many workplace injuries and fatalities – life-threatening distractions.

Some workplace distractions and interruptions are unavoidable but others – if not properly controlled or regulated could lead to injuries, lost productivity, and a decrease in worker morale.

Inattention

Whether you're worrying, daydreaming, or chatting, mental distractions are just as dangerous hazards as defects in machines. Focusing on the work at hand means removing mental distractions. Consider taking a break and getting some fresh air to refocus, forget about personal matters, and deal with them later.

Before addressing or responding to another person, workers should shut



down or disengage any work tool, equipment, or processes. Job training should include instructions not to interrupt others during a critical job phase or process. Instruction manuals and procedural guidebooks should be kept on site to answer frequently asked questions and thereby eliminate the need to interrupt or distract other workers.

While the computer is often a work requirement, it can also lead to temptation. It is all too easy to jump online and check Facebook, Twitter, or personal email. Many workplaces block or prohibit social networking, gaming, texting, and personal emailing during work hours. Wasting excessive time on social networking sites and the constant need to check your email is a time consuming

Poor Housekeeping

When your workstation is cluttered with personal items, unsorted files, food wrappers, and other junk – the visual clutter can easily translate to mental distraction. You might miss the obstruction in the conveyor operations or lose the important safety notice. A messy work area cluttered with papers, files, and personal items is not only a distraction but a safety hazard. Keeping your area clean and organized will help promote productivity.

In other work environments, even not-so-loud sounds can be a distracting annoyance. Constantly ringing phones, conversations, and loud faxes, copiers, and printers can distract workers from their job tasks or - depending on the level or duration of the noise - can contribute to workplace stress.

Think twice before choosing a place for workstations. And, make sure work spaces are at a



Machinery

External noise from tools, mobile equipment, and processes can be distracting in industrial and construction work environments.

safe distance from machines, heavy equipment, electrical circuits, busy foot traffic, and obstructions or slip/trip hazards.

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Hearing

In some work environments wearing a headset with low volume music can be relaxing to workers and help them to safely focus on their work. However, wearing headphones on a construction or industrial site can be dangerous if it prevents workers from hearing warning signals, mobile equipment backup alarms, and safety instructions. But before donning those headphones, ask your supervisor if this is acceptable or safe.

Walking around while talking on the phone or wearing a headset distracts your attention from safety and could result in a slip or fall or cause you to run into or be struck by something or someone.

If your workplace broadcasts music, you may find it hard to concentrate on a task. Wearing earplugs to help reduce the noise may be an option as long as your job does not require you to answer phones or interact with customers.

When noise levels in your workplace are too tough for your eardrums to handle (accurate measures must be done to determine this), then you should talk to your supervisor.

Long/Unkempt Hair

Serious accidents can happen because somebody was fixing their hair while operating equipment, carrying a load, driving a vehicle, or other tasks that require two hands and a clear head.

Loose and flowing hair can get in face and eyes, obstruct view, or even catch in machinery.

If your workplace safety requirements allow long hair, do yourself a favor and tie it back or keep it under a hat.

Dealing with Workplace Distractions

While some factors in the workplace can play a role in causing distractions, the fact is more occupational hazards spring from unsafe acts than from unsafe conditions. Much of worker safety is within their

control. So think straight, follow procedures, and keep yourself safe at work.

Workplace distractions are costly according to research indicating businesses lose hundreds of billions of dollars annually in productivity because of workplace distractions. And, with limited resources, time is money, so it is critically important to pursue methods to counteract hazardous conditions.

Reducing Workplace Distractions

- ✓ Conduct regular walk-throughs to observe behaviors and conditions.
- ✓ Interact with employees to uncover workflow, workload, or machinery issues.
- ✓ Limit the use of personal cell phones, music players, head phones, tablets, internet access, and other technology distractions.
- ✓ Offer micro-breaks to allow employees to step away for a few minutes to recharge, stretch, and refocus.
- ✓ Structure repetitive work into stages or sections instead of a long run of continuous work.



MED-1 Wellness Services

Screenings

Height & Weight
Body Mass Index (BMI)
Body Composition
Blood Pressure
Cholesterol
Diabetes
Colo-rectal cancer
PSA

Specialized Programs

Health risk appraisals
Immunizations
Smoking cessation
Customized worksite programs
Drug free worksite
Special exams

Education

CPR/First Aid training
AED programs
Wellness coaching
Health fairs
Wellness education



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