

Safety Training?

Your Life Could Depend on It

by Vince Politte

You may not always recognize the importance of safety training. You may even think it's not really necessary. After all...you're a seasoned worker who's "been doing it this way for years" and nothing really bad has happened.....YET!



We've all probably been there at one time or another; work becomes routine, alertness decreases and a relaxed attitude replaces the cautionary edge we had when our job was new. We can accomplish our work task without too much thought or "in our sleep," so to speak. It can happen in any type of job, but when it happens in an industry that involves hazardous materials, intricate procedures or moving machinery, it's the most dangerous workplace scenario possible. Studies have shown that work performed with little conscious thought actually increases the odds of an accident.

Are you an accident waiting to happen?

Having an appreciation for safety in general and actually understanding the applicability of health and safety in your workplace are two completely separate concepts. Whether your job is to use a piece of machinery safely or to keep a properly stocked first-aid kit available, the importance of health and safety in the workplace cannot be understated.

Periodic safety training serves as a reminder to everyone that the potential for workplace hazards is a reality that should be addressed. It doesn't matter whether you've been doing your type of work for a day or for twenty years—no one is immune. *Accidents do not discriminate* and it only takes one to ruin your life.

Just how important is accident prevention?

Most employers realize that safety training in industries such as construction, transportation, healthcare and food service is critical to keep both employees and non-employees safe. If employees in these fields do not receive proper training, their safety—and that of those around them—may be jeopardized. For example, lack of safety training for construction workers can lead to a wide variety of accidents in which innocent passers-by can be hurt. The following scenarios are not common, but they can occur:

- Items on scaffolding fall to the ground, injuring someone walking by.
- A heavy-equipment operator ruptures a gas line, causing the evacuation of the surrounding area.
- A bad storm allows unsecured materials to become airborne, causing injury or damage.
- A bulldozer driver accidentally hits a power pole, damaging a nearby car and causing a power interruption that lasts for several hours.

In the transportation industry, proper safety training is also important, particularly if the substance being transported is, or has the potential to be, hazardous. The following scenarios

represent accidents that could have disastrous results:

- A fuel tanker crashes and gasoline is spilled. A passing motorist discards a cigarette, which ignites the gasoline and causes a dangerous fire or explosion.
- A bus driver is not properly trained and drives recklessly, putting his/her own life at risk, as well as the lives of passengers or occupants of other vehicles.
- A big rig driver, attempting to make up time, decides to go "just a few miles more." He nods off at the wheel, crosses the median and collides head-on with a sedan, killing the driver and two children.

You can never have too much training

These examples demonstrate how important it is for workers to receive safety training appropriate to the type of work being performed. Employers must then follow up and make certain that the training was sufficient to ensure worker safety.

Safety training should be organized so that the order in which material is presented matches the steps that should be taken on the job. Furthermore, it's imperative that everyone being trained understands the material. It's not enough that a worker is present for the training or is given a test after the training. A post-session question-and-answer period can help trainers determine whether information was effectively assimilated or if further review is necessary. If there's a general lack of understanding in specific areas, additional training sessions should be scheduled or a refresher course planned for a later date.

Once training is completed, employees must immediately demonstrate and apply their new knowledge and skills. If workers don't understand the training information well enough to use it on the job, the training was not effective. Immediate feedback should be available to identify exactly what workers do (or don't) know about workplace safety. Supervisors must make it a priority to observe employees at work and answer any safety questions that arise.

Most of these suggestions are relatively simple and inexpensive to implement, but the payoff in safety can be significant. Remember, training is only effective when workers understand and use what they've learned.

It takes less than a second to lose your life or become disabled. Proper training can help transform that second from life-changing to life-saving. Let's all stay safe!