

Five tips for workplace injury prevention

Written by Jeffrey Quinn
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Accidents and emergency situations can happen in any environment, in any industry, at any time. In 2008, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 3.7 million recordable injuries and 5,071 fatal workplace injuries. And, although the employer may be the responsible for creating a safe work environment, it is the responsibility of each individual employee to take an active role in maintaining safety at their worksite every day.

1. On the Road Again – According to The Occupational Safety & Health Administration workplace driving accidents cost employers an average of \$60 billion annually. To help stay safe, there are a number of tasks both employers and employees can do:

Each month, perform an inspection on all company vehicles and make any necessary repairs. Before driving a company vehicle, visually make sure break lights and turn signals are working, tires have adequate pressure and that there is gas in the vehicle. Follow all formal safe-driving plans and policies for the workplace, and make sure to abide by all traffic laws.

2. Extreme Conditions – Your job may require you to work in some extreme conditions. Whether inside or outdoors, exposure to heat or cold can often affect your duties, and both very cold and very hot temperatures can impact with your health.

Cold: You should dress in layers, properly cover your head, feet, hands and face, which are most prone to frostbite. Also, keep a change of clothes at work in case your clothes get wet. Your workplace can reduce exposure to cold by installing on-site heating devices. Try to decrease the time you're required to work in the cold.

Heat: If you have any preexisting medical conditions, consult your physician before working in extreme heat. Wear loose-fitting clothing, take frequent breaks in a cool rest area, open windows and utilize fans, and get plenty of fluids.

3. Protect Yourself - Personal Protective Equipment is an important part in preventing workplace injuries. OSHA and other agencies having jurisdiction require the use of PPE to

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reduce exposure to various hazards. Management should have policies and procedures in place for using PPE, and it is the employee's duty to use it correctly. Employees should undergo training and practice wearing PPE properly.

Eye and Face Protection - Goggles and face protection must be used when workers are at risk from flying particles, chemicals or caustic liquids.

Head Protection - Hard hats must be worn where there is a danger of falling objects.

Foot Protection - Safety shoes are required in work areas where heavy objects could be accidentally dropped on the feet.

Hand Protection - Gloves are required to protect workers from cuts, scrapes, punctures, burns, chemical absorption or temperature extremes.

Hearing Protection - Ear muffs or ear plugs must be available in noisy workplaces.

4. Report Dangers – Reporting unsafe situations is one way you can improve the safety of your worksite.

For example, if you come across a chemical spill and cannot identify the substance, do not touch or move it. Barricade the area and report the spill. Your worksite should have a spill response plan that includes emergency phone numbers, evacuation procedures, containment instructions and proper cleanup processes. Additionally, keep all working and walking surfaces free of spills and debris. Spilled coffee in a stairwell or an electrical cord stretched across a walkway can lead to slips, trips and falls. Be proactive and report the danger. Watch where you are walking and exercise care given the conditions.

5. Keep Your Workplace Clean – Poor housekeeping in your office setting or at a worksite can cause frequent workplace accidents.

Cleaning should be an ongoing effort by all employees. Keeping your workplace clean can help remove pollutants from air and hard surfaces. Because indoor air pollution can arise from construction materials, furnishings, fixtures and equipment, this can affect skin, eyes, nose, throat and lungs. Ensure your work area has proper ventilation and air filtration. Also, many injuries are caused by materials, scrap, debris and trash left lying around the job site. Anything left lying around becomes a slip, trip or fall hazard. Keep all of the materials stored on the job site in a neat and orderly manner. Clean debris and trash as work progresses. If you are not using tools and equipment at the time, do not leave them lying around.

A company's management team should establish workplace safety policies and procedures. An accident prevention program should encourage employees to take safety measures seriously, and to report any dangerous situations. Resources should be made available to employees, along with contacts and phone numbers in case of emergency. Workplace safety is everyone's responsibility. When employees and employers work together, everyone benefits.

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