10 Basic Safety Rules

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Meeting Kit

What’s at Stake

Workplace safety can be a complex issue, but learning and adhering to a few safety basics can go a long way toward keeping employees safe on the job. Many workplace injuries and fatalities are directly related to either not knowing how to do something and attempting it anyway or committing unsafe acts through inattention or for other reasons.

What’s the Danger

Most sane people wouldn’t strap on a pair of skis for the first time and head down an expert run, let alone a beginner hill, without taking ski lessons. Yet many workers who lack training will hop onto a forklift and attempt to operate it or try to muddle through a process they don’t understand and hope for the best.

Example

A young worker was attempting to fill a nitrogen gas canister when it exploded, killing him and causing severe leg and hand injuries to a customer standing nearby. The worker was not trained to recognize that the canister he’d been asked to fill was a low-

pressure one, rather than a high-pressure model.

The low-pressure canister exploded when it was exposed to about 20 times its maximum pressure capacity. Ironically, the young worker's supervisor and trainer, who would have immediately realized the danger of filling a low-pressure vessel with high-pressure nitrogen gas, was taking his first day off in six months on the day of the explosion.

How to Protect Yourself

Protect yourself in the workplace by following these 10 basic safety rules:

1. If you haven't received training and are not qualified to operate a piece of machinery, stay away from it. Driving a forklift isn't like driving a car nor is operating a pneumatic nail gun like using a hammer. If the question "how hard can it be?" comes to mind, stop yourself right there before finding out.
2. If you are unsure about any aspect of your training, ALWAYS speak to your supervisor for clarification before attempting to perform a task. Many workers don't want to appear clueless by asking a "stupid" question, so they attempt to figure out a procedure on their own, frequently with serious consequences.
3. Always use the recommended personal protective equipment (PPE) before attempting any task. If you don't know what type of gloves, eye protection or respirator to use, ask someone who does know.
4. Before using any chemical or product, read the (material) safety data sheet or label to find out how to use it safely and what to do if an emergency unfolds.
5. If you see a hazard, such as a spill on a floor, a burned out light bulb in a critical area or clutter on a stairway, attend to it. Don't leave it for someone else to deal with. Someone could easily get hurt in the interim.
6. Never attempt to lift an object that is too heavy or awkward for you to handle. Ask for help or find a lifting device

such as a handcart or dolly. Check out your intended walking path for other workers or obstacles and ensure you can see where you are going with the load.

7. When you are in a rush it can be tempting to run. Don’t do it. You could move into the path of forklifts or other machinery or workers, or slip, trip or fall. Be especially careful when opening doorways when you can’t see who or what is on the other side.
8. Use the right tool for the job. Pliers aren’t wrenches. They can easily slip off a nut, causing an injury. Similarly, a wrench shouldn’t be used as a hammer and any tool that has a damaged handle, bit or blade should be withdrawn from service. It’s also dangerous to use a tool with a dull blade or bit, because the extra pressure required to make it cut can cause it to bind or kick back.
9. Know what to do in an emergency. If a fire broke out would you know what to do? Have you been trained to operate a fire extinguisher? Could you find one in a hurry? Could you get out of a building that was quickly filling with smoke? If you haven’t received training in emergency procedures, talk to your supervisor.
10. Don’t take shortcuts. Skipping steps or rushing to get work done can easily result in serious injuries or death on the job. And the quality of your work frequently suffers when you take shortcuts. Do the job right and do it safely.

Final Word

Staying safe on the job comes down to being properly trained, staying focused and not straying from safe methods of performing procedures. Workers who do things the right way are far more likely to retire with all fingers and toes intact.