Analyzing Hazards – A Task for Many Hands and Many Eyes

What’s at Stake?

A hazard is the potential for harm that, if left uncontrolled, can result in an injury or illness. A job hazard analysis, JHA for short, is all about breaking down jobs and tasks into smaller steps to find the hazards and then ways to reduce or remove those hazards.

A JHA might also be called a job safety analysis (JSA).

What’s the Danger?

Many jobs and tasks have hazards associated with them. It can be a job as simple as changing a light bulb or as complex as shutting down a nuclear reactor.

If these hazards aren’t identified and corrected through safe work practices, engineering controls, or the use of PPE and other methods, they can lead to injury, equipment and property damage, catastrophic events, and death. This is true for the light bulb and the nuclear reactor.

How to Protect Yourself

Typically, a JHA is conducted by a group made up of at least one supervisor and two or three employees who are well versed with the steps that a job entails.

One employee performs the task while the other JSA team members observe and note what they are seeing, using words describing actions such as “reaches into metal box next to machine” or “grasps casting and lifts it out of box.”

Once the steps are listed, all potential hazards associated with those steps must be identified and fixes recommended. Recommendations for eliminating or minimizing those hazards must be tested by workers to ensure they are effective.

Your Role

You may think a JHA is best left to your supervisor’s or safety manager, but you have an important role to play. Your experience in doing a job gives you insider knowledge of what can go wrong from a safety and health standpoint. You, and your fellow workers are a vital part of the JHA process and your input into safety issues in your job is essential to an accurate and successful JHA.

While some hazards would be obvious to everyone, you probably encounter situations that haven’t been considered by others. If you keep that knowledge to yourself, the person who takes over your job while you’re on vacation might discover a hazard the hard way.

If you are aware of situations where you or other workers have had close calls or became injured because of hazards of which they were not aware, you should ask your supervisor about the

possibility of participating in a JHA.

Your employer might also use a JHA as a training guide for new employees, a “refresher” for existing employees, and as a tool for determining why an accident happened.

Changes and Updates

Finally, a job hazard analysis reflects the most up to date, safe and efficient way to do a job. Jobs do not tend to stay the same. New processes, materials and tools are being introduced all the time and what worked before might no longer be safe. Reviews and updates must be done regularly. Suggested times include:

- Periodically, once a year or every quarter for example.
- When the process changes.
- When equipment or materials are changed or added; and
- After an incident.

Final Word

Any way you analyze it, becoming involved in a job safety analysis makes sense in keeping you and your co-workers safe.