Know Your Enemies: Workplace Hazard

What’s at Stake?

If you and your friends were facing a dangerous, deceptive enemy, you’d want to find out all you could about the enemy and share any information you come up with. The fact is you do have such a treacherous enemy—the workplace hazard. And this enemy threatens you and your co-workers daily.

What’s the Danger?

Unnoticed workplace hazards can take your life in an instant or cause you a lifetime of suffering and disability. These same hazards can injure or kill co-workers, customers, and visitors to your site. Knowing the hazards in your workplace and communicating the danger to others is critical to everyone’s safety.

Examples

1. A spill that isn’t cleaned up leads to a slip and fall that causes irreparable trauma to the brain of a young worker who was already making a big impact in her field. But her future is drastically altered by the trauma she endured
2. A burned-out light in a stairwell that maintenance has put off replacing, sends a worker tumbling down the concrete stairs to the landing below. In addition to being bruised and sore from the fall, the worker spends several weeks in a cast and rehabilitation with two broken wrists.
3. A malfunctioning machine guard isn’t reported by the operator on the dayshift. The nightshift operator, unaware of the damaged guard, is pulled into the machine and crushed.

How to Protect Yourself

1. Learn all you can about workplace hazards and share information with your co-workers to keep everyone safe.
2. Participate in the training programs your employer provides. Remember, safety information and training are shared in several ways: it could be one-on-one or group training; online training; on the job or hands on training; live demonstrations; or learning by watching videos and reading manuals.
3. Expect your employer to provide you with the information you need to identify and avoid hazards. But, seek this information out on your own too and be continually alert to new dangers.
4. Visual cues to protect you from hazards are all around you. Use them. Notice the signs and posters that pass along safety information. They point out hazards such as the possibility of falling objects or the presence of flammable liquid vapors. These visual reminders tell you how to avoid injury– i.e., wear your hardhat, or don't smoke. Signs also point the way to emergency exits and equipment to be used in case of an emergency, such as fire extinguishers and first aid kits.
5. Study the labels on chemical containers and read the Safety Data Sheet (SDS). The label will tell you the contents, hazards, and what to do in case of a spill or exposure. The SDS provides more safety information about the chemical and in greater detail than a label.
6. Finally, follow your company's system of reporting hazards, injuries, incidents and near misses. Report hazards or concerns immediately. Reporting is an important link in correcting current workplace hazards and preventing future hazards. If you don't report hazards you leave them lurking and waiting to injure or kill someone else.

Final Word

Remember, just because you escaped an accident or injury, doesn't

mean the next person will. If you have information about a safety hazard, share it. Keep the lines of communication open to defeat the enemy—the workplace hazard.