

Why Accidents Happen and How to Avoid Them

What's at Stake?

Accidents may seem like a word used only in safety briefings until one occurs. When it does happen, it comes along with reeling effects: injuries, death, court prosecutions, loss of property, damage to company reputation and the environment. The resultant slowdown in business and work activities further drives down income. However, the immediate and remote causes of workplace accidents can almost always be traced to unsafe acts and unsafe conditions.

What's the Danger?

Unsafe acts are human-related actions that threaten the health and safety of workers. Examples of unsafe acts:

- Taking shortcuts which involve by-passing safety instructions and procedures that are meant to protect workers from harm. These include carrying out a job without performing a job safety analysis (JSA), engaging in high-risk work without a work permit. Aside from granting work permission, permits also contain important information, such as emergency response, appropriate PPE, hazards and precautions, the name of responsible personnel.
- Inadequate training. Imagine driving a car on a freeway, after a few informal lessons, without learning the traffic laws and undergoing a driving test. Wouldn't your inability to understand traffic laws and your lack of driver training increase the chances of an accident occurring? Lack of training makes it much more likely you will be in an accident at work too!
- Using damaged or faulty work tools and equipment is an unsafe act and a big safety hazard.

- Engaging in horseplay during work activities reduces your concentration and makes it harder to observe safety rules. It also makes it difficult to get a full description of an accident and might affect your right to a compensation or health insurance.
- Abusing drugs or working under the influence of drugs and alcohol limits mental focus, slows your reaction time, affects balance and coordination. These factors make you a hazard to yourself and your co-workers.

Unsafe conditions are hazardous, managerial, physical and environmental conditions that exist in the workplace; they play a crucial role in triggering accidents.

- Environmental hazards: example, extreme weather conditions, fires, oil spill, gas leakage.
- Equipment failure.
- Inadequate communication: example, no safety meetings, toolbox talks, safety signage, safety policies, or safe work procedures.
- Poor safety culture: no reporting systems, recordkeeping.
- Poor housekeeping.

How to Protect Yourself

- Obey all safety rules (including the use of PPE); they are for your protection.
- Only carry out tasks you are trained for; especially tasks requiring special skills.
- Never mix work with play, it is harmful in more ways than one.
- Always inspect your work tools/equipment in order to detect damages and report them.
- Do not abuse drugs and never work under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Take a permitted break from work whenever you are mentally stressed out.
- Maintain good housekeeping before, during and after work.
- Ensure proper understanding by asking questions and

repeating during communication.

- Always inspect the work environment for strange changes before any activity.

Final Word

Accidents are caused by our actions and inactions; the most important step towards avoiding them is identifying and addressing their causes. Report unsafe acts and conditions as soon as you see them and don't engage in unsafe acts.