

Alaska Municipal League Joint Insurance Association

Loss Control Incentive Program FY 2021

SAFETY BRIEF: SAFETY IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

You've probably heard the slogan "Safety First." It's a good principle, both on the job and in our personal lives. No one will argue that safety should be ignored, but does a catchy slogan improve employee safety? The problem with safety slogans is that they sound good, but after a while they become background noise. Think of a safety poster that you pass by every day at work—when was the last time you actually read the words and thought about what it says? When a message is repetitive and monotonous, we tend to ignore it over time.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 5,333 fatal work injuries in 2019, the most on-the-job fatalities since 2007 and the fifth increase in the last six years. If we are always thinking of safety first, shouldn't work injuries and fatalities be decreasing? The underlying problem is that most safety programs assume every employee uses "common sense" to guide their actions. We're not born with "common sense," but we acquire it throughout life from our experiences and from observing other people's experiences. Because we all have different life experiences, what may be "common sense" safety to one person could be completely foreign to another person doing the same job.

By some estimates, nearly 80% of workplace accidents are caused not by unsafe conditions but by unsafe acts on the part of employees. Engaging in unsafe behavior in the workplace can be like walking the high wire without a safety net—you may complete the job without incident, and you might even do so repeatedly, but one slip can kill you.

One of the biggest threats to your safety and the safety of those around you is complacency. Think about that example of a safety poster you pass by every day. The message probably seemed urgent when it was first posted, but as time goes on without an accident the message takes on less significance. Consider coming in to a shop on your first day of work and seeing this sign posted:



You're new to the job, working with equipment you aren't completely familiar with, and you take the message to heart. You have respect for the tools you use and think each job through before you begin, making sure you follow proper procedures to protect your safety and that of your coworkers. Time goes on and the job becomes familiar. Maybe you had an incident or two when you weren't paying attention or rushed a job, but you haven't suffered any reportable injury. In fact, none of your coworkers have been injured on the job. You witness a coworker skipping standard procedures to get a job done faster, and no harm comes to them. Eventually, the message in the sign has little impact on the way you do your job and complacency sets in.

Ultimately, the only person responsible for your safety is you. OSHA can set standards to help ensure workplace safety. Your supervisor can provide you with the training, tools, and written procedures



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necessary to protect you. Your coworkers can do their part to work safely, report hazards immediately, and maintain a safe work area. But no matter what everyone around you is doing, your odds of suffering a workplace injury increase dramatically if you don't take personal responsibility for your safety. Taking responsibility for your safety can mean asking questions when you aren't sure how to do something, getting training and taking refresher courses to make sure you are qualified for the job tasks you are assigned, mentoring new employees to help them gain the training and experience they need, and keeping a "safety first" attitude in everything you do, both at work and in your personal life.

Beware of complacency. Don't fall into an auto-pilot routine. Remember, there really is no such thing as "just another day" at work. Unexpected events are just that – unexpected. It only takes one unexpected event in an otherwise routine day to change your life forever.

OSHA's most cited violations in 2020

Why include a review of OSHA's top ten most cited General Industry violations for fiscal year 2020 (October 1, 2019–September 30, 2020) in a talk about personal responsibility for safety and the dangers of complacency? Well, the not-so-funny thing about the annual list of OSHA's top ten most cited violations is that the violations are almost always the same. They may change rank on the list, but the same OSHA standards appear year after year. The OSHA top ten list includes both General Industry and Construction standards, but we're going to focus on General Industry, which makes up half of the 2020 list.



Hazard Communication (1910.1200)

Ranked #2 in 2020, 2019, and 2018

This standard addresses chemical hazards, including those produced in the workplace and those imported into the workplace. Employers using hazardous chemicals must follow four main requirements:

- 1) ensuring the proper chemical labeling;
- 2) providing safety data sheets;
- 3) training employees; and
- 4) creating a written hazard communication program.

For additional training in this area, please see ***Hazard Communication: The New GHS Standards (SH79)*** in the AMLJIA's online training.



Respiratory Protection (1910.134)

Ranked #3 in 2020, #5 in 2019, and #8 in 2018

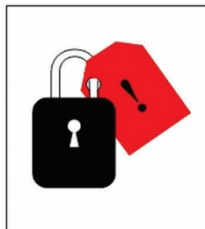
This standard directs employers in establishing or maintaining a respiratory protection program. It lists requirements for program administration; worksite-specific procedures; respirator selection; employee training; fit testing; medical evaluation; respirator use; and respirator cleaning, maintenance, and repair.



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For additional training in this area, please see ***Respiratory Protection (RP61)*** in the AMLJIA's online training.



Lockout/Tagout (1910.147)

Ranked #6 in 2020, #4 in 2019, and #5 in 2018

This standard outlines minimum performance requirements for the control of hazardous energy during servicing and maintenance of machines and equipment.

For additional training in this area, please see ***Lockout/Tagout Safety (SG14)*** in the AMLJIA's online training.



Powered Industrial Trucks (1910.178)

Ranked #7 in 2020, 2019, and 2018

This standard covers the design, maintenance, and operation of powered industrial trucks, including forklifts and motorized hand trucks. It also covers operator training requirements.

For additional training in this area, please see ***Forklift Safety (FS61)*** in the AMLJIA's online training.



Machine Guarding (1910.212)

Ranked #10 in 2020, #9 in 2019 and 2018

This standard covers guarding of machinery to protect operators and other employees from hazards, including those created by point of operation, ingoing nip points, rotating parts, flying chips, and sparks.

For additional training in this area, please see ***Machine Guarding (SH63)*** in the AMLJIA's online training.

