Stop, Look and Move Out of the Line of Fire



WHAT'S AT STAKE?

We often hear about people being "in the wrong place at the wrong time." While this saying often refers to people who have been victims of crime, it certainly applies to workers as well.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

In the workplace, being in the wrong place at the wrong time is sometimes referred to as being in the line of fire. You can be injured or killed by your own actions or by the actions of another worker or even a stranger.

Example

The simplest example of a line of fire situation is holding a nail to get it started with a hammer. If your aim is poor, the hammer will miss the nail and come down on a finger or thumb.

There are plenty of more serious examples of line of fire incidents, including these:

- Running a spinning saw blade through several fingers because your hand is resting in the wrong place.
- Standing too close to a truck being unloaded and becoming crushed by unstable pipes that suddenly roll off the side once restraints are removed.
- Standing in a mobile machinery operator's blind spot and being caught between the moving vehicle and a wall.
- Being caught under an elevated load that suddenly lets loose when a sling break.
- Standing too close to a crane or excavator that contacts a high-voltage power line and energizes the ground, electrocuting workers in the vicinity.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Before starting a job, take a moment to look around for any potential hazards. Ask yourself what could possibly go wrong and what could happen to you if you were working there.

Could you be hit by welding sparks? Is someone operating a forklift too quickly and too close for comfort? Are you standing below an elevated area where a worker could accidentally knock a heavy object off a roof or scaffolding, into your path?

A common line of fire mistake is to be standing in the way of a closed door that could suddenly fling open. Workers have been knocked off ladders while changing light bulbs or painting in the path of a door. The solution is to prop the door open and post a warning sign.

Here are some other line of fire hazards and suggestions for avoiding them:

- Standing too close to another worker who is wielding a tool such as a sledge hammer or a large wrench. The head could fly off the sledge hammer or the wrench could slip off the nut, sending all of its force into your body. Don’t stand in its path.
- Standing too close to materials secured by steel bands that are under tremendous pressure. When one of these bands is cut, an end can whip around and inflict serious injury. Ensure you are wearing padded clothing, a hardhat, safety shoes and safety glasses. If there are several straps, cut the one farthest away first, using duck-billed shears with long handles. Stand well back while releasing straps.
- Working on machinery without being certain that all of its hazardous energy sources have been safely shut down. Hazardous energy sources go beyond electricity, including hydraulic, pneumatic, mechanical (spring), chemical and thermal energy, plus gravity. Moving a power switch to the off position or flipping a breaker switch won’t keep you safe. If it hasn’t been properly locked and tagged out by an authorized person, don’t go near it.

FINAL WORD

A busy workplace is no place to daydream. Stay aware of your surroundings, think of how you might be in the line of fire and step away from the danger.