Which Safeguard Makes the Difference Meeting Kit

There are many employees who are tired of the constant barrage of safety discussions, rules, procedures, paperwork, inspections, etc. There are many safeguards put into place every single day for a single hazard and many more for all of the other hazards that we face. Often times, we cannot “see” or know what exactly prevents an incident from occurring.

WHAT ARE SAFEGUARDS?

Improving safety in the workplace takes more than just telling workers to wear personal protection equipment or finding ways to eliminate hazards. Your workplace safety strategy needs to look at every possible way to keep people and the facility safer and implement the most effective options. Safeguards are steps that can be taken to make something inherently safer.

IMPLEMENTING SAFEGUARDS

A safeguard could be something as simple as installing a physical barrier to keep people away from a specific danger. For example, if a part of a machine tends to get extremely hot while in operation, it may be appropriate to add a cage around the hot areas so people can’t get too close and get burned.

WAYS TO IMPROVE WORKPLACE SAFETY FOR WORKERS

Often when a safety hazard is identified, it is thought of as a single issue. It may fall into the category of a slip/trip/fall, electrical, machine guarding, or in one of the many of the other hazard categories. A lot of time and money is spent to keep the workplace incident-free and employees healthy. When looking for solutions to workplace hazards, we often try to find the simplest solution. Safety solutions should be thought of as a combination of many actions.

No Simple Solutions: Some individuals have the mindset that one solution will resolve the hazard. They may think that wearing PPE or installing a guard will resolve the issue. Having the mindset that a simple solution will resolve a problem is in and of itself hazardous. Our roadways are safer when we follow multiple rules; if people only followed the speed limit and ignored traffic lights, the rate of accidents and injuries would certainly go up. It is no different with safety.

Stopping Work: A prime example of a best practice that is effective but often does not equate to knowing whether or not an incident was prevented is **stopping work** to address a hazard. For example, you see a new employee repeatedly struggle with

picking up heavy boxes that a forklift operator has been setting down on the floor. Having more experience with the task, you stop the employee and have him move to an area where the forklift operator can safely set the boxes on an elevated surface. This allows the employee to pick up the boxes with correct posture with ease.

These kinds of **stop work** situations occur all the time in a variety of forms, but many times they do not occur right before an obvious incident is about to happen. Because of this, you do not know if what you did prevented an injury that day or in the future. If the **stop work** situation was you shouting to the forklift operator to stop before he reversed off of a ledge of a loading dock you know that you most likely just stopped a serious incident from occurring. Most often the **stop work** situations look more like the first example of lifting boxes and it is never known for sure if an injury was prevented or not.

For example, when elevated heights work is being performed, taping off the area with **DANGER** tape is not the only safeguard that should be put in place.

- Tools and equipment should also be secured
- Toe boards and guard rails should be inspected
- Harness, lanyards and tie-off points inspected
- Traffic should be eliminated
- Netting may need to be installed

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES AROUND MACHINERY TO PROTECT EMPLOYEES

Implement good housekeeping practices to promote safe working conditions by doing the following:

- Remove slip, trip, and fall hazards from the areas surrounding machines;
- Use drip pans when oiling equipment;
- Remove waste stock as it is generated;
- Make the work area large enough for machine operation and maintenance; and
- Place machines away from high traffic areas to reduce employee distraction.

Employees should not wear loose-fitting clothing, jewelry, or other items that could become entangled in machinery, and long hair should be worn under a cap or otherwise tied back or contained to prevent entanglement in moving machinery.

Adequate instruction in the safe use and care of machines and supervised on-the-job training are essential in preventing amputation injuries. Only trained employees should operate machinery.

FINAL WORD

It is not just stop work situations that can make the difference in preventing an incident. Any single safeguard could be the one that makes the difference. From listening to a safety meeting to verifying a message from a coworker you heard on the radio, the simplest safeguard or best practice could prevent the most serious incident on any given day.