

SAFETY MATTERS



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Reduce injuries and illnesses by focusing on new hire safety

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New employees are more likely to be injured on the job than experienced workers. But it doesn't have to be that way. By addressing the risks much as you would address physical or chemical hazards, you can significantly eliminate them.

What's happening and why?

Estimates suggest that 30 percent to 40 percent of injured workers have been on the job for less than a year.

The first step is to be proactive. Use good hiring practices to ensure that those you employ are safety-minded, not overly risk-taking, and have a good track record. Many businesses use personality-profiling tests to gauge a candidate's likely safety performance. A strong drug-free workplace policy with preemployment screening can help as well.

The problem persists for a variety of reasons.

- Employers assume that new employees know more than they do and that common sense can prevent incidents. Steps and safeguards that seem obvious to safety professionals and experienced employees are not at all intuitive for those who lack experience. For example, it may seem like second nature for seasoned workers to inspect their tools before using them, but not for those new to the job.
- New employees are often afraid to ask questions. New hire orientation should communicate clearly that employees have the right to, and are expected to ask questions and get answers in a language that they can understand. Good employers welcome questions and eagerly provide answers.
- The environment is new and employees aren't familiar with the hazards. OSHA requires that when employees receive their initial assignments they must be trained in the relevant parts of the emergency plan. Make sure your new hires know exactly whom to contact and how to report an injury, hazard, or near miss.

- Task-specific training focuses on what to do rather than what to avoid. Safety training, including risk identification and avoidance, should be integrated into job training at every level. A good job hazard analysis covers the hazards inherent in every step of a job. Make sure training addresses the reasons they're being asked to take precautions. When new employees understand why they're being asked to do something, they're more likely to comply.
- Employees lack knowledge about hazardous substances. OSHA's hazard communication standard is also known as the right-to-know rule for a good reason. Employers are required by law to inform employees about the hazards of substances used in the workplace and how to use them. Under the standard, workers must also be made aware of the location of the written program and how to access safety data sheets.
- New personnel don't understand the purpose of personal protective equipment (PPE) and how to properly use it. The idea of wearing a mask, vest, or hard hat may be foreign to employees who have never been required to do so. Other employees may have been at risk at past jobs, but their employers didn't enforce the rules. Either way, you want employees to know from the start that there's no compromising or shortcutting PPE requirements and that there will be consequences for breaking the rules.
- Employers fail to convey the safety message. Your newest employees should know by the end of day one that safety is a value and a priority at your site. The message is conveyed in what you say, what you do, what's in writing, and the behavior of site leaders. It comes down to creating an environment where safety is a priority and where employees can stop work if conditions warrant.

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