

Safety Shot

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Precautions



Clausewitz said in his seminal work on war (titled, with stunning lack of originality “On War”) “Everything is very simple in war, but the simplest thing is very difficult.” To some degree we could say the same of safety. Trying to keep everyone safe is really simple – just avoid any accidents. But when you start looking at how accidents can happen, you discover that there are a whole bunch of ways they can occur, and that more often than not it is not one simple thing that caused the accident, but rather a combination of several things, all happening together in such a way as to create the incident and ending up with somebody hurt, or even worse, dead.

This complexity is daunting (and yes, it is real – if you read the accident reports from OSHA or MSHA you find that more often than not there was a complex interaction of events that gave rise to the accident). It makes it all seem as if there is so much complexity that there is nothing we can do to try and make things more safe. But that is an illusion – there is a lot we can do, but at times it does not seem to be very important and so we perhaps think it is not really going to help.

So, what might be some of those simple things we might try to do to help enhance safety in our workplaces? Well – let’s begin on the floor and look at trip and slip hazards. A trip or a slip may not look like a particularly severe thing, but in fact a lot of bad things can result when someone slips or trips. The reason is that if you experience a slip or a trip, you are still in motion, but that motion is no longer controlled. That means you no longer have the ability to avoid hazards – if something is in your way and your movement is uncontrolled, you are going to make contact with it.

Now, not every slip or trip results in compound fractures or death, but some of them do (especially, by the way, if you have an aging workforce – us older folk are more likely to sprain or break things and

slower to recover from those sprains and breaks than younger whippersnappers!). In fact, slips and trips are among the most common workplace accidents, and may give rise to some serious injuries. What makes this doubly concerning is that most trip and slip accidents are easily avoided. So, here in three bullet points are the issues:

- Slips and trips are among the most common workplace accidents
- They can give rise to serious injuries
- They can be easily avoided.

So, how do we avoid these sorts of accidents. Well, to use another old saying, the first step is “a place for everything and everything in its place.” You need to have a tidy workplace, with nothing out of place on the floor, to minimize trips and slips. Take a look right now at your workplace floor. Is there stuff on it that should not be there? If so, you have trip hazards in your workplace. When your mother told you to “go tidy your room” she was doing it for your safety (well, maybe not, but...).

Of course you can have the tidiest workplace in the world and someone can trip over a step or down a ramp that they were not expecting. So, we need to clearly mark (paint is our friend!) when there are such things as steps and ramps in the workplace area. It is also helpful if folk are walking carefully and with awareness around the workplace – nobody should be wandering around a garage with their nose stuck in their cell phone, for example!

A third step that can be very helpful for minimizing slips and trips is adequate lighting. If you have shadowy corners in your shop, those are the places where slips and trips are most likely to happen. Determine first why these areas are poorly lit, and then, if appropriate, change the lighting to provide adequate visibility. You cannot avoid things on the floor if you cannot see the floor.

Finally, and this might be seen as giving in a bit but it is good common sense, consider teaching people how to fall properly. If you are going down then if you can fall properly you will minimize the likelihood of injury.

So, to sum up, here is how to minimize the slip and trip set of hazards:

- Tidy things up and do not leave stuff lying about on the floor
- Make sure walking areas are well marked, and make sure people walking around are paying attention to their surroundings while doing so
- Determine where lighting is not adequate and improve it if needed
- Teach your folk how to fall safely, so as to minimize injuries if the worst does happen.

Stay safe out there...