A Joke Isn’t Funny When It Hurts!



Safety Talk

What’s at Stake?

At one time or another, almost everyone has pulled a “harmless” joke on a friend. But there is difference between a true witty joke that does not cause any harm and what is commonly known as “horseplay”. The task at hand is to avoid any acceptance of the horseplay mentality in the workplace.

What’s the Danger?

The following are examples of horseplay incidents and horseplay mentality that could lead to serious harm.

- Remember when you pretended to shove a friend down the stairs. What if the person had slipped and fallen? The possible outcome could have been a serious head or spine injury. Even a twisted ankle is no laughing matter.
- Then there was the time you shot an eraser, propelled by an elastic band, across the room towards your co-worker. What if it had connected with his eye? The damage to the cornea could have resulted in the loss of sight.
- One horseplay incident which did result in the loss of an eye occurred when a person was smoking a cigarette. His co-worker playfully jabbed him in the ribs. Startled, the smoker inadvertently raised his hand up to his face, burning his eye in the process. Saying, “sorry, and was only fooling around” doesn’t mean much at a time like this.
- If there is an all-time horseplay favorite, fighting with fire extinguishers could be it. What do you do when a fire starts and the fire extinguisher is empty? What if someone gets the chemicals sprayed into their face and eyes?
- Another incident involved a water fight. This time two glass bottles were used, resulting in sliced wrist tendons for one of the pranksters. Several days off work and several more weeks in bandages with follow-up physiotherapy was the cost.
- Horseplay, even when you are not directly involved, interferes with your ability to concentrate on the task at hand. A lack of concentration could cause you to look away just as you are making a critical cut to a piece of wood. It may only take a fraction of a second to glance up at a friend’s

antics, but your hand could be amputated just as quickly. Why should their moment of laughter be the cause of your pain or permanent disability?
- When we were children, we indulged in school-yard jokes, such as tripping someone or pulling a chair out from under a classmate. But those antics are old, tiresome, and dangerous. As adults we should be able to conduct ourselves in a manner which respects the right of our co-workers and ourselves to work safely.

How to Protect Yourself

Sound company policy forbidding horseplay acts or horseplay mentality followed up by aggressive enforcement is the first step to stopping horseplay conduct. It also takes regular update and company review with employees of the company's policy forbidding horseplay. Corrective action by the company and employees buying into the policy of no horseplay in the workplace is required.

Final Word

The law of averages dictates that what you may have "gotten away" with before will eventually cause somebody an injury. Do you really want to have a friend's disability on your conscience for the rest of your life? Horseplay can only be stopped by you. Don't indulge in it. Don't encourage it. Don't laugh at the antics of your company's fool.