What You Don’t Know Can Hurt You

WHAT’S AT STAKE
Hazard communication describes the many ways information is passed along about any kind of workplace danger.

WHAT’S THE DANGER
We can prevent serious injuries by talking to each other about hazards and how to avoid them.

EXAMPLE
Mario warned co-workers about the loose step and shaky railing on the basement stairs. However, no one told the maintenance people who would have fixed it. A worker on the night shift tripped on the step and plunged through the railing to the concrete floor, suffering broken bones.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

When you are aware a hazard exists, tell the people who might be affected, but also tell the people who can do something to fix it.

Hazard information is conveyed in a variety of ways in the workplace. These include:
Safety signs. Examples are the signs warning you to wear eye protection around grinding equipment and forbidding you from smoking near flammable substances. When you know of a temporary hazard such as a slippery floor, you should post a sign to warn others until the problem can be corrected.

Warning lights. These warn you of hazards such as traffic or machinery about to start up. Special kinds of sirens, bells and whistles warn of hazards on the plant floor, in confined spaces, high noise areas and other environments.

Chemical HazCom. This includes the system of labeling chemical containers with written information and symbols. Each workplace chemical is accompanied by a material safety data sheet which contains additional information.

Training. With online sources, written materials, videos, safety posters, safety talks and other media used by trainers, training is an important method of communication.

Reporting hazards. This is an extremely important part of hazard communication,

and one which every worker has an individual responsibility. When you see a situation which could cause an injury, it is your duty to report it promptly so it can be corrected.

Reporting malfunctions and damage to equipment. Defects in electrical, mechanical, hydraulic and other systems can kill.

Reporting injuries, even minor ones. It is important for your supervisor to keep records of all injury incidents so the causes can be eliminated. To prevent infections and complications, all injuries should be treated.

Reporting close calls. The next worker may not be as lucky.

Communicating about unsafe behavior. If you see a co-worker doing something which might endanger himself or others, point it out. Report the unsafe practice to your supervisor, who will then make sure everyone is instructed in doing the job safely.

FINAL WORD
Communication is a vital part of safety. Speak up and do your part.