Workplace Accidents and How to Prevent Them Safety Talk



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Meeting Kit

Safety Talk

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration, frequently called OSHA for short, has a succinct definition for a workplace accident. It's an "unplanned event that results in personal injury or property damage." OSHA is a government body tasked with helping keep workplaces safe for its employees. An accident, by definition is something that happens unintentionally.

When a workplace accident happens that requires cleanup and sanitization of the worksite, how should it be handled? If you said, "send in the janitorial staff," you would be wrong for several reasons:

1. **Potential bloodborne pathogen exposure.**Blood found at the site of a workplace accident can contain viruses such as hepatitis B and C, HIV, and Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), all of which can infect individuals who come into contact with it.
2. **Violation of health and safety laws.** Any employee with a risk of exposure to blood or biological materials has the right to free hepatitis B vaccinations, bloodborne pathogen and PPE training, and personal protective equipment paid for by their employer. Employers who require workers (including janitorial employees) to clean up after a serious workplace accident could be in violationof OSHA's health and safety laws.
3. **Inexperienced cleanup.** The blood at the site of a workplace accident can to seep into carpet, padding, sub flooring, and walls, and has the potential to infect workers if not properly sanitized. Hiring an experienced bioremediation company will not only ensure that the site is clean, but will also ensure it is sanitized to hospital-grade standards.

WHAT’S THE DANGER?

Whatever variation of the definition you prefer, workplace accidents can be painful and costly for both employers and employees.

Here are a few types of accidents most commonly reported in the workplace.

Types of Workplace Accidents

4. Overexertion: We do it all the time: pull a bookcase, carry heavy equipment or lift awkward boxes. Injuries from overexertion, such as sprains and strains, are the leading workplace accident out there.
5. Falling: Just like in our opening example, falling presents a significant risk in many work environments. It could be as simple as falling down stairs or tumbling off a roof.
6. Slips and trips: Have you ever seen the image of someone slipping on a banana peel? It’s the same idea (probably minus the banana). Slips and trips can be the culprit behind things like muscle strains and other injuries.
7. Falling objects: Whether it’s a heavy box of files or a piece of machinery at a construction site, falling objects present a particular risk of head injuries to workers.
8. Repetitive motion: It’s a little less obvious, but repetitive motion injuries have an impact on many types of workers, from frequent computer users who struggle with carpal tunnel syndrome to auto mechanics who develop chronic back pain.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

While there are specific safety requirements for individual industries, which employers need to meet, there are often human errors that fall through the cracks simply because they’re overlooked.

Workers and employers rush to complete deadlines and may not pay as close attention as they should. In other cases, there may be hazards that an employer or managers aren’t aware of in their workplace.

Put safety at the forefront. Follow this list of concrete tips on how to prevent injuries from happening in the first place.

1. Keep Workspaces Clean

Most people don’t think of cleanliness as a deterrent to accidents but workplace order actually does diminish the chance of injury.

A cluttered, unclean work area is more difficult to efficiently maneuver in and workers are more prone to hazards. Make sure staff adhere to something as simple as running computer cables and cords properly so that they don’t create a tripping hazard.

No matter if your work environment is a manufacturing warehouse or an office cubicle, keeping the area clean and well-maintained decreases the chance of accidents.

2. Post Proper Signage

Employers should post signs reminding employees of proper safety procedures in noticeable places and in spaces where those specific procedures should be practiced.

3. Stay up to Date on Vehicle Maintenance

For employers that provide staff with company vehicles to complete daily tasks, it’s imperative that cars are well maintained and serviced on a regular basis.

This may seem obvious but according to Bankrate, the bill for accidents resulting from unperformed vehicle maintenance tops $2 billion each year.

4. Report Dangers and Accidents

Most employees know that they should report an actual accident but it’s important that employers encourage their staff to bring any foreseeable danger to management’s attention.

5. Provide Proper Training

All staff need to be properly trained for their position. This includes teaching them how to use equipment and follow safety procedures during their course of work.

6. Provide Proper Equipment

All staff must also be equipped for their specific job. Equipment may vary from safety harnesses to proper gloves and goggles. Under no circumstances should employees perform functions without the proper equipment.

7. Avoid Shortcuts

Many times, accidents happen not because the safety precautions are unknown but because people take short cuts when they’re familiar with their job or are in a hurry.

For example, a worker may climb without a safety harness because they only want to complete one small task and gearing up is time consuming.

That can be the difference between a minor injury and a life-threatening catastrophe.

8. What to do when an accident has occurred

When an accident first occurs, the number one thing is to report it immediately. Some employees don’t think to report an incident if there isn’t serious injury.

In reality, every accident should be reported. An injury that seems minor when it first happens can end up being more serious down the line.

The second reason it’s important to report any injury immediately is because it indicates a hazard that should be addressed.

Even if the employee wasn’t injured in any serious way, reporting the incident

can give the employer information to make a protocol change that will prevent future accidents.

The third reason to report the injury immediately is because there is often a short span of time to report an accident for employees to be eligible for workers’ compensation coverage related to accidents.

Different states have varying mandates on the amount of time that can pass between the time of the accident and reporting an injury.

Workers’ Compensation coverage will often cover injuries and all medical bills associated with injuries and may include compensation for time off work during recovery.

In many cases, this coverage will still apply whether the injured employee was at fault in causing the injury or not. Case in point: if the injured employee was not following posted safety requirements he will still often be covered under workers’ compensation.

Employers are mandated to have workers’ compensation insurance to protect workers from just such injuries. However, these laws also prevent employees from suing the employer in many, but not all, instances.

FINAL WORD

Reporting immediately close calls or near misses paves the way for workplace safety.