

Distractions that Cause Workplace Hazards

Distractions are a major culprit in many workplace injuries and fatalities. Here are a few distractions that may put your life on the line:

1. Mental Distractions and Inattention

Have you ever replayed in your mind unpleasant scenes at home while operating equipment on the job? Perhaps something big happens to you this weekend and you're anticipating its wonders while literally climbing on a ladder. Maybe one or two times you're mixing chemicals and you decide to have a little chat with a co-worker. No harm in that right? Think again.

Mental distractions often lead to inattention. You could miss noticing that pedestrian racing close to your forklift just because you're too engrossed over that argument you had with your wife. Whether you're worrying, daydreaming, or chatting, mental distractions can be likened to hazards or defects in machines that you need to secure with "guards". You need to focus on the work at hand.

If that's too hard to do, then you may consider taking a break and getting some fresh air to blow those distracting thoughts away or finishing that nice chat with a co-worker. If the work is urgent, then you could tell yourself to forget about personal matters first and deal with them later by coming up to a co-worker (possibly your supervisor) and sharing with them your difficulty in getting rid of that thing (or person) that tortures you to the very core of your being.

2. Poor Housekeeping

Apparently if godliness is next to cleanliness, safety is next to the latter as well. Just imagine how distracted you'd be if your workstation is cluttered with all your personal stuff, unsorted files, bolts, screws, wires, food wrappers and other junk. Visual clutter can easily translate itself to mental clutter. It would be easy to miss that obstruction in the conveyor operations when dust and all these crumpled papers mess up with your focus.

So befriend that broom and sweep all those visual distractions before they do something nasty. Throwing those junk and sorting your files are big steps to trashing all the horrible hazards that could befall you. Remember, too, that poor housekeeping says a lot about your attitude towards safety, quality, and production.

Those big, fat monsters you call your techie friends can be distracting and destructive, too. Don't be fooled. Think twice before permanently choosing a place for your workstation. Make sure it is at a safe distance from machines, heavy equipment, electrical circuits, busy foot traffic, and obstructions or slip/trip hazards.

3. Hearing

Sure, listening to music is fine. It keeps you entertained, boosts your mood. But even Elvis Costello's melodramatic voice or Rhianna's hippest lyrics can cause you an arm. Before donning those headphones, ask your supervisor if this is acceptable or safe. If not, then for the love of your life, you'd have to say goodbye to that music playlist you worked so hard to compile.

Now wearing earmuffs or earplugs is a completely different story. When noise levels in your workplace are too tough for your eardrums to handle (accurate measures must be done to determine this), then you should talk to your supervisor. The same thing should be done when you think noise keeps your attention off your tasks. If installing appropriate engineering controls is not feasible, you should do well with a good pair of earmuffs or headphones.

