

Written and communicated safe work practices – it's not just common sense

Through the years I have heard employers express the sentiment that their employee was injured because they were not using common sense. Even when someone says they can do the job or have had prior experience that may not be true. Common sense does not necessarily help your employee understand the true requirements of a job task.

Guidance for employees in the form of written safe work practices is important for a clear understanding of job requirements and responsibilities. The objective is to communicate safe work practices so that employees have a clear understanding of how to safely accomplish their job requirements. Both general and job-specific safe work practices must be identified, documented, and made available. Have all employees sign a statement to indicate they have read, understood, and will follow all safe work practices.

Examples of general safe work practice knowledge expected of most employees include:

- Good housekeeping
- Personal protective equipment
- First aid procedures
- Ergonomic principles
- Hazard recognition and abatement
- Emergency Action Plan

Job-specific safe work practices apply to operations and tasks that involve recognized hazards and risks associated with those specific tasks. Job-specific safe work practices must be posted or made readily available in the work area. Examples of job-specific safe work practices include:

- Respiratory protection
- Lockout/tagout procedures
- Confined space entry
- Hazard communication
- Powered industrial truck operation
- Bloodborne pathogens, if applicable
- Personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Machine/equipment operation
- Material handling procedures

Implementation

After the general safety orientation, the supervisor provides new employees with job-specific safety training. Employees should not be allowed to start a job until they have received instructions on how to perform the job properly and safely.

If an employee will perform a hazardous job, the supervisor should complete a Job Safety Analysis (JSA) on that job and incorporate the JSA into the job-specific safety training. JSAs emphasize the identification and control of the potential hazards associated with each step of the job.

Safe work practices are essential for any organization because they prescribe the accepted behavior that is expected from all employees. The safety team may be involved in the development of the employee safety handbook. The handbook includes general safe work practices and specific safe work practices that apply to each job.

Safe work practices usually are printed in an employee safety handbook. The first page of this handbook should include a Safety Policy from senior management.

When providing employees with a safety handbook, review the material with them annually and ask questions to ensure their comprehension. Training should thoroughly support all content. Have employees sign a statement certifying that they understand the safety rules and policies and agree to abide by them. Maintain this signed statement in the employee's personnel file.

The Division of Safety & Hygiene's safety, industrial hygiene and ergonomics specialists can help you develop effective strategies to make your workplace safer and healthier. They can visit your workplace or consult with you by telephone or email. These services are available for any private or public employer. BWC also offers specialized options for certain employers. You can request these services online at: info.bwc.ohio.gov or 1.800.644.6292

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