

SAFETY MEETING TOPIC: Hazard Awareness – The Little Things Count

Most of us have probably heard the old saying, "It's the little things that count."

There are many small things that influence our lives, and ignoring them can sometimes have serious consequences -- particularly when it comes to safety. We have all been trained to watch out for the big hazards that could harm us, but the little ones can sometimes cause serious injuries too.

One company became very concerned when its accident frequency showed a large increase over a three-month period. Management began an in-depth check of systems, equipment, and material that are considered to be high-hazard: heavy machinery, ventilation, toxic substances, machine guarding, etc.

To everyone's surprise, none of these things were the cause of their accidents. Chemicals were properly labeled and stored; machines were in good repair and properly guarded; the exhaust fans, sprinkler systems, respirators, etc., were all in good working order. Instead, accidents stemmed from a variety of "little things" that had been ignored until an injury occurred. For example, they found that serious falls had been caused by:

- A puddle of oil on the floor from a leaking forklift. No one had poured absorbent on the spill because it was "too small to worry about." It wasn't too small, however, to make a passing employee slip and fall when he didn't notice it. (Furthermore, the leaking forklift needs to be repaired so this accident won't happen again.)
- A box of supplies that had been left on the floor in front of a shelf, instead of properly stored. It had been walked around dozens of times before someone finally tripped over it.
- A ladder that was placed in front of an outward-opening door "just for a minute" to change a light bulb. It was knocked over by another worker coming through the door, and both he and the worker on the ladder were injured.

All these "accidents waiting to happen" had been ignored because they didn't really seem that dangerous to the workers involved. Employees all knew about, and carefully avoided, the major hazards found when repairing energized electrical equipment or bypassing machine guards.

We often intend to report a defective tool, extension cord, or stepladder to the maintenance department but don't take the time, or forget about. It is important to follow through on our good intentions, since these are just the sort of "little things" that can result in a serious injury to ourselves or to other workers.

Minor injuries left untreated are also "little things" that can cause big trouble if ignored. "Just a scratch" can become infected; a speck of dust in the eye can scratch the cornea and cause severe eye damage if not attended to. So, be sure to report even seemingly minor injuries and get appropriate first aid treatment.

Little things do count and if we take a few minutes to pay attention to all the potential hazards around us we can prevent serious injuries from happening to ourselves and other employees.