



No Unsafe Act is Worth the Risk



We need to understand that experience alone can't keep us safe and our skill has nothing to do with our safety.

Electrical Incident

Frank and another electrical worker were servicing an electrical motor. They had turned off the power switch, but didn't lock it out. When his co-worker suggested that they test to make sure the power was off, Frank responded "Look, I've been doing this for 20 years; I know which switch feeds the motor." When they completed the task, Frank said, "When you've been doing this job as long as me, you just know which switch feeds which panel. It's like second nature to me. Don't worry; one day you'll know how." Sometime later, Frank's co-worker and a new electrical worker were performing a similar task. The new worker asked "What about checking the power?" The experienced worker replied, "Don't worry about it; I know what's what," but he was electrocuted when he reached into the electrical panel with a screwdriver.

Conclusions Drawn From This Incident:

Many risk takers believe that their skill and experience allows them to sidestep safe work practices and procedures. Sometimes they are successful, which only reinforces this errant belief. Frank's decision not to follow procedure and verify the equipment was de-energized stemmed from a false sense of security based on his years of experience. We need to understand that experience alone can't keep us safe and our skill has nothing to do with our safety. When experienced workers ignore safe work practices, less-experienced workers are less likely to continue to follow the proper procedures. An interesting statistic shows that incident rates are highest among new workers. Then they drop off as the workers gain experience, only to rise again as their years of experience increase. This is a cycle that must be broken and underscores why all workers, no matter their experience, must remain vigilant about following safe work practices each and every time.



Confined Space Incident

Smitty and a co-worker were preparing to replace a pump filter in a tank on the plant grounds. When the co-worker proposed going to get the paperwork necessary for entering the confined space, Smitty replied, "Are you nuts? That will take forever; I promised my wife we'd be on time for dinner." Despite his co-worker's concerns about testing the air and obtaining an entry permit, Smitty entered the tank and began to service the pump. Soon he was overcome by a poisonous gas. As his training prohibited him from entering the space to help, his co-worker radioed for help while he watched Smitty die.

Lessons from This Incident:

When you find yourself pressed for time and tempted to take a risk, take a moment to stop and consider what is at stake. Smitty said he was in a hurry, but it may be more appropriate to say he was distracted. He let something totally unrelated to his job task to determine his ability to perform that task safely. Working while distracted is similar to driving a car while distracted; it interferes with your decision-making, impairs your reaction time and places you and others at risk. Rushing to finish a job is a symptom of working while distracted and should be a warning sign that you need to slow down and consider your safety. Other warning signs of distracted working include anger, being preoccupied with outside issues or being distracted by other workers or operations. We must not bet on being able to perform our job safely while rushing or being inattentive. We must ensure that we are properly focused before beginning each new job task.

"Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful."

~ Samuel Johnson

Welding Incident

Brad was a welder who always wore the tinted shield in his hood that protected his eyes from the light emitted from his arc. When he finished welding, however, he would move about the shop without wearing the required eye protection. “I knew the light from the arc would definitely hurt my eyes, so I protected myself from it. But just standing around the shop, who’d of thought I’d get hit in the eye?” he said. When he finished a welding job in the shop one day, he lifted his hood. A co-worker near him was grinding a piece of metal and a shard from the operation struck Brad in one of his eyes.

Lessons from This Incident:

Another common lapse of judgment is only thinking about safety when confronted with obvious hazards rather than following safety rules all the time. The person who did the risk assessment for the shop area determined that safety glasses should be worn at all times. Just because we don’t agree with a safety rule or understand why it is in place, it’s still our responsibility to follow it. When it comes to the many various types of personal protective equipment we may be required to wear, we need to understand this. This equipment is considered the last line of defense against hazards that can’t be controlled by other means. If we choose not to wear it, we are just rolling the dice that our number won’t come up this time. There are countless examples of choices we must make each day that affect our safety. Each of these situations is a chance for us to make an important choice. We can choose to risk our lives and health on the random spin of the cylinder, or we can decide that our lives, our hopes and our dreams are too important to leave to chance. We must make the right choices when it comes to our personal safety and realize that when we follow safe work practices and procedures, everyone wins—us, the company and our loved ones.

Fall Incident

Two maintenance workers were preparing to perform a maintenance task on an elevated work platform. As they tied off their fall protection to a conduit pipe, one of the workers asked, “Do you think it will hold?” His co-worker replied, “What does it matter? I don’t intend to fall. If you’re scared, you just stay there and hand me the tools.” He then climbed over the platform railing and reached to get his tools from the other worker. When he bobbled them during the exchange, he reached out to try and catch them. This caused him to lose his balance and fall from the platform. The conduit he was tied off to ripped away from the ceiling and he fell to his death.

Lessons from This Incident:

There is no room in the workplace for the type of dangerous attitude displayed by the worker who fell. The company wants you to work safely, period. We must not make the mistake of believing that our unsafe behavior makes us better or more effective than others. It just makes us dangerous. This is the same type of attitude that leads to various types of horseplay or even pranks that often end in injury.

Reference: www.eri-safety.com

