

WORKPLACE SAFETY POCKET GUIDE

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The Workplace Safety Pocket Guide is available with your organization's name imprinted on the cover.

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The Human Factor

Why should you bother to read this book? What's in it for you? Here's why: read this little book on workplace safety and you'll enjoy great health, more friends, a happier family life, and more pay!

Consider this: Employees who take safety seriously avoid injuries; that's a health and safety factor. These employees tend to have a more mature outlook that is considerate of themselves and others. And think about an employee who gets injured on the job. What does a serious injury do for an improved lifestyle and paycheck? Sadly, not much.

Safety-minded employees have a “response-able” attitude – an attitude that takes health and safety procedures into consideration in their lives and work. So they are responsible to follow health and safety procedures and rules, use the necessary protective equipment, and avoid the following “human factors:”

- **Ignorance** – Either a lack of experience or training – a frequent cause of accidents
- **Daring Behavior** – Or call it foolhardy behavior or horseplay
- **Poor Work Habits** – Too often a new person follows unsafe examples set by veteran employees.
- **Unapproved Shortcuts** – Haste can result in injury – quickly.
- **Lack of Emotional Control** – Stress and anger can distract you enough to cause a safety problem.
- **Physical Failure and Fatigue** – You might call it “biting off more than you can chew.”

There are plenty of federal and state laws that spell out health and safety practices for the workplace, but actual “response-ability” for these safe practices belongs to individuals – to you. Accept your ability and obligation to respond to the health and safety aspects of your job. By doing so, you help ensure

Workplace Violence

Did you know that eight out of every one hundred workers in America suffer a workplace violence related injury every year? Experts think the real number is much higher because many workplace violence incidents go unreported. Whatever the real number is, it's too high. You should be able to go to work every day without fear of having supervisors, co-workers, clients, customers, or the general public assault, threaten, yell, push, or verbally abuse you.

Here's what you can do to protect yourself:

If you are in a situation that causes you to feel threatened, report it to your supervisor. If your supervisor is the person you feel threatened by, document the incidents that have occurred, and report them to his or her boss immediately. Include any fear you may have that some form of retaliation may take place

Become familiar with any workplace violence incidents that have occurred in your workplace. Know where and why they occurred and how they could have been prevented. Access all the resources (training, alarm, escape route, co-workers' assistance etc.) you would need to prevent similar incidents from happening to you.

Perform a security audit of your work area. Is access limited to persons with a legitimate reason for being there? Do doors and windows lock? Are work and parking areas well illuminated? Alarm systems functioning properly? If surveillance monitoring exists, does it miss certain areas or periods of time? Are there times during your work shift when you are isolated from contact with co-workers, supervisors, or security personnel? Form "buddy" relationships with co-workers and check up on each other regularly.

If you haven't already received it, ask your supervisor for information and training you can use to recognize and handle threatening, aggressive, or violent behavior.

Drug-Testing for Safety

The workplace is no place for drugs or alcohol. Employees who put themselves under the influence of drugs while on the job not only risk serious injury to themselves, they also present a danger to co-workers. In addition to death or injury, behavior associated with drug and alcohol abuse can result in ruined equipment, blown completion deadlines, or, at the least, embarrassing incidents that damage relations with customers and jeopardize the company's chances for future growth.

To prevent drug and alcohol abuse in the workplace many companies now have policies that call for drug testing. This likely begins with a test of the prospective employee prior to hiring. The policy requires all supervisors to undergo training to recognize signs of early drug/alcohol abuse, signs of depression, or any other changes that would indicate a potential problem. This is called the **observation** stage. Unusual behavior, erratic performance, irregular attendance, sloppy work, careless attitude, etc. are all grounds for the supervisor to ask the employee to take a drug test right then. This is called **for cause** testing. This is serious business because a person's integrity is on the line, and, depending upon the circumstances, the police could be involved.

If someone tests positive—meaning that they have some “inappropriate” substance in them at the time of the test—they'll be sent to the company's rehabilitation counselor, or human resources manager, for a chat. If the substance involved is an illegal drug, this may also be the employee's exit interview.

At the company's option the employee may be given an opportunity to try harder and straighten out. If, after re-testing a few weeks later, the employee tests negative (clean), they may get their job back. After that they may be subject to random tests, and if nothing turns up, everyone goes back to work as normal.

Some companies have a policy of random drug tests for all employees. There's no advanced notice. Names are selected by a lottery. The result is the testing of about 25% of the workforce every six months. In theory, everyone gets tested once every two years.

Occupational Heat Stress

Sam works in a paper mill, where it's hot and humid year round. He just came back to work from a relaxing two-week vacation at the lake cabin. Half way through the morning, Sam started to feel dizzy, weak and nauseous. His partner saw him faint, and found him looking pale and feeling clammy. They rushed Sam to the plant first aid room. He was kept lying down and when he came to, he was given an electrolyte fluid drink. In a short time, Sam felt a whole lot better. Sam had Heat Exhaustion.

Frank worked outdoors on a construction project on a very hot day. He was working hard, and he'd been sweating a lot, but not drinking water or the supplied electrolyte drink because he couldn't stand the taste. Besides, Frank had a bit of a hangover, because he'd been to his brother's bachelor party the night before. Frank felt very hot and suddenly he collapsed, luckily someone noticed. When his co-workers got to him, his skin was hot and dry to the touch. More luckily, one worker had first aid training, and knew what to do. Immediately, they got Frank out of the sun, and wet him down to cool him off, repeatedly soaking him with water from the drinking jugs. The ambulance took Frank to the hospital, and he pulled through okay. The doctor said, if Frank's co-workers hadn't cooled him down, he would have died. Frank had Heat Stroke.

Heat stress occurs when the body generates internal heat and absorbs heat from a hot work environment faster than it can be lost. The heat build up is seen as an increase in body temperature. Remember how bad you felt the last time you had a high fever? Well, heat stress creates a physical "fever" in your body. Your body's normal first response to heat build up is sweating. The evaporation of sweat is usually an effective way to cool you down.

Sometimes excessive sweating sets the stage for other problems. In very humid environments, the sweat doesn't evaporate well because the air can't absorb much more water vapor. Excessive sweat carries away water from the body. If this water is not replaced, you can become seriously dehydrated. Since sweat is salty, it also carries important salts (medical folks call them "electrolytes") away from

Protecting Yourself Against Heat Stress

Although treatment for heat stress is available, prevention is the best method by far!

Acclimation – People need time to adapt to work in hot environments. It takes your body about two weeks to adjust, so take it easy for the first two weeks or so. You can lose acclimation in about two weeks as well. This is why Sam got sick, he overdid it the first day back on the job after his vacation. Also, acclimation can be reduced by fatigue, illness, or in Frank's case, a hangover.

Fluid Replacement – If you work in a hot environment, you must drink about a gallon of water a day! This is impossible to do at one time, so you must constantly drink throughout the day. Avoid drinking too much coffee, tea, or cola drinks, they cause you to pass more water.

Electrolyte Replacement – In the old days, this used to be done by taking salt tablets, and some employers still provide them. Many others now provide flavored drinks that contain all the same salts, in a dilute form, as those lost in sweat. Either method can be effective, so choose the one you like best. One problem with salt tablets is that you may take too many. Excess salt can dehydrate you as well. Also, for many people, excess salt is not good for their blood pressure.

Rest Breaks – Periodic rest breaks, especially in a cool location are important. Resting lowers your internal heat because you aren't using the muscles as hard. A cool location allows you to lose excess heat to the environment.

Protective Clothing – In some hot work places, or for special short term hot work, protective clothing or equipment can help avoid heat stress. These include reflectorized clothing, face shields, air cooled jackets, and believe it or not, a vest containing blue ice packets. Usually, your employer supplies this equipment if it's needed.

Spot Cooling – It is impossible to cool a whole hot boiler room. But it is possible to provide cool air to a spot, like a control panel, or to a small booth. This spot cooling can provide a refuge for a worker in an otherwise hot place.

Slips and Falls

Slips and falls are still a common – and serious – source of workplace injury and death. Many workplace activities involve carrying loads, or the use of ladders or scaffolds can put you at risk of fall-related injuries. Awareness of the hazards, and keeping to good practices, can help to minimize the slip and fall hazards that you could face.

A slip or a fall is unlikely if you are in your usual work environment and everything is in its place. Make a change in that workplace, and you invite a fall. For example, unexpected litter, improperly stored materials, or oily or wet patches on the floor are sure to invite a fall. Be on the lookout for debris, oil, water, or other hazards. Get them cleaned up before an accident does happen.

Walk where you're supposed to walk. Avoid shortcuts through plant areas with which you're not familiar. Watch where you're going; don't be distracted by conversations or horseplay. On stairs, use the handrail. Do your best to avoid carrying heavy loads with both hands, especially if your vision is blocked – and especially when going down. It's better to use the elevator or get some help. Make two trips instead of one heavy trip. It's safer, less work, and less strain on your back. Avoid placing objects on the stairs as a reminder to carry them up the next trip. The next “trip” may be someone else's.

If your work involves scaffolding, check the scaffolding assembly. Be on the lookout for weld separations or serious dents and bends that can weaken supports. When on the scaffold, avoid climbing up on boxes or using a step ladder on the scaffold. Instead add another level of the scaffolding. Use scaffold planks that are undamaged, straight, clean, and level. Use toeboards to prevent you or your tools from slipping over the edge.

Ladders are common equipment, yet ladder-related falls remain a leading cause of serious and sometimes fatal injury. When using a ladder, take the time to position it carefully. Set the base on a firm, stable footing. Don't put a ladder on top of boxes, pieces of equipment, or other objects that may move. Use the correct height ladder for the job.

The Spine

The spine supports the entire body. All of the body's major muscles and bones are anchored to it, and it is involved in all but the slightest motions.

The spine is a very flexible structure. This is due to the 33 separate bones called vertebrae that form it. The vertebrae are cushioned by "discs." Most spinal problems are related to the discs.

When the spine is in an erect, straight line position, weight is spread equally across the discs. When the spine is bent, or twisted, however, one side of the disc is squeezed harder than the other, and injury may result.