

Strategies for Improving Workplace Safety Culture and Reducing Injuries



A company can have all the appropriate written safety policies and procedures in place and still fail employees because there's no workplace safety culture in place. Your policy manual is a critical component of that culture, but it's useless unless everyone, from the owner to the janitor is actively living the safety culture.

The National Safety Council says that a worker is injured on the job every 7 seconds. In fact, a significant portion of workplace injuries occur in the construction industry. Most of those injuries are due to overexertion, contact with equipment, and falls. The Bureau of Labor Statistics puts that number at 2.8 out of 100 full-time workers who will suffer injuries each year.

That's a lot of missed production days! Many of those injuries could be prevented by a solid commitment to workplace safety.

The Importance of Workplace Safety Culture

The simple answer is that everyone takes responsibility for the safety of themselves and everyone else on a job site. Everyone knows the rules and follows them every time. Everyone has the authority to fix dangerous situations without needing to get permission. Everyone watches out for potential safety hazards and reports them promptly so that the risk can be mitigated before someone is injured.

Unfortunately, employees are sometimes afraid to point out unsafe conditions for fear of reprisal. It should never be the case that anyone is punished for reporting current or potential safety issues. Instead, it should be encouraged and rewarded.

A healthy workplace safety culture empowers everyone to be proactive. A safe workplace doesn't just happen. It's intentional.

Key Health and Safety Hazards at the Workplace

Every industry has its unique dangers, but some hazards are common to all workspaces.

As mentioned above, **overexertion** is the main cause of injury at work. Lifting heavy items, twisting, bending, and repetitive motions all put stress on the body. Employees need to be able to adapt workspaces to their individual needs. Workers who are taller or shorter than average will not be comfortable in the same office chair or with the same desk setup. A working safety culture will encourage individuals to ask for what they need to work safely.

Unsafe **equipment** or the unsafe use of equipment is the second most frequent cause of workplace injuries. Safety culture ensures that every employee is properly trained on all equipment they use or encounter. Safety features are never disabled. Anything that moves is moved with care, and workers use caution around moving equipment.

Additionally, care is taken so that heavy objects are kept close to the floor, and nothing is stacked so high as to become a hazard by falling.

The third most common work injuries involve falls, slips, and trips. A workplace safety culture will empower any worker to clean up spills, secure ladders, and move trip hazards.

8 Ways to Implement a Workplace Safety Culture That Reduces On-the-Job Injuries

Here are some key things that support a good workplace safety culture and that will help reduce workplace injuries.

1. Up-to-date, clear, and comprehensive written policies and procedures.

Review them at least annually, and update them as needed. Emergency contact numbers should be easy to find. Electronic versions are great, but consider printing out a few in case of power outages or server issues. Manuals should always be available and correct.

Write in clear language. This is not the place for technical jargon or acronyms.

Include all relevant federal, state, and local laws. Lay out the industry standards.

Write a policy and/or procedure for everything! When questions come up, add the topic to the manual, or revise unclear instructions. Then distribute the new information to every employee.

2. Train new employees and retrain them regularly.

Ask new hires to read the manuals and sign off that they did. Review them with the entire staff at least annually, and document the training. Invite relevant guest speakers to staff meetings or use relevant online training options.

Consider offering first aid training to employees, too. And keep a stocked first aid kit in an easily accessible and well-marked place.

3. Empower every worker to repair or report hazards.

Give everyone the responsibility to watch for dangers and do something about them. Encourage suggestions about making the workplace safer.

Everyone should know to whom to report hazards and should have a clear method of doing so. Do you have a safety officer to take all reports, or is the manager on-site at the time?

Sometimes an emergency phone call is required, but written or emailed reports and requests should be the ideal method of communication. This starts a paper trail to follow up on each issue.

All such reports and requests should be promptly handled, and this should be communicated to the person or persons making the report or suggestion. Employees should know that their input is appreciated and valued.

Consider forming a safety committee to consider all suggestions and implement those that will work for the company.

4. Provide proper personal protective equipment.

Personal protective equipment plays a vital role in avoiding workplace injuries. Every employee must have sufficient, properly fitted personal protective equipment and be trained in its use. Require that every employee use the appropriate personal protective equipment when needed, without exception. Inspect it regularly and replace it as needed.

5. Expect that workers will take regular breaks and meals.

Tired or hungry people make mistakes. Everyone deserves time to take care of their physical needs. Don't require people to work non-stop or encourage them to miss meals.

Encourage people to take stretch breaks and not sit for long periods. Short breaks improve productivity and prevent injury.

Demonstrate good habits by taking your breaks and meals, and let workers see you.

6. Consult experts to create ergonomic workstations.

Comfortable workers are more productive. Simple adjustments to workstations can keep employees healthier and prevent repetitive injuries. Train employees on ways to protect their bodies while lifting or bending. Accommodate differences in strength and abilities.

7. Good housekeeping makes for safer spaces.

Expect workers to put things away after use. Tools, ladders, and supplies should all have a place.

Have a no-tolerance policy for leaving workspaces dirty. Clean up spills immediately. Keep cleaning supplies and brooms and mop handles handy.

8. Regularly assess safety policies and procedures.

Have meetings to discuss what's working and what's not. Encourage feedback and consider implementing suggestions. Be proactive in updating policies and procedures.

Reward workers for safe work habits. Reward them for looking out for each other.

Conclusion

Work can be a dangerous place. Make your company culture one that expects safety procedures to be followed without fail and without fear of reprisal for bringing attention to hazards. Safety first should be your motto.

Your workers are your biggest asset, and protecting them from unsafe working conditions benefits everyone.

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