

WHY EMPLOYEES GET HURT

By Gary Hanson, President of American Safety & Health Management Consultants, Inc.

Whenever I begin working with a new client, I always like to listen to the supervisors explain to me why their employees get hurt. I think I have heard about every different reason imaginable. Many are very good, but there are always the ones that we simply meant to blame the employee or give the supervisor an excuse, these include:

- * The employee was careless
- * The employee is stupid
- * The employee doesn't have any common sense
- * The employee simply wouldn't listen

It may seem that these are reasons, but I haven't met an individual yet that was careless about getting seriously hurt. Most of us care a whole lot about getting hurt, but we may not place a high priority on our individual safety. Therefore, we don't always do the necessary things to keep ourselves safe. We believe accidents happen to other people. Bad habits are developed and once developed they are extremely hard to break.

We all believe we have common sense; unfortunately, we don't always use it. In fact, common sense is an uncommon virtue, used uncommonly by uncommon people in uncommon situations. In other words, it is highly selective. Obviously, some people have a higher level of common sense than other people.

Most employees are not stupid, we are not all geniuses, but most employees have the necessary intellectual ability to function adequately in most work environments. We sometimes do things that may appear stupid, but at the time we usually had a good reason for what we did. However, bad things happen to good people who do dumb things. I advise supervisors to always anticipate what employees could do that would appear dumb. If it is possible someone will figure it out.

Employees will listen to what we think is important; they take these clues from us. If we do not stress safety forcefully and daily, employees will not believe it is that important. There can be no doubt that safe work behavior is mandatory and that failure to work safely will result in counseling or disciplinary action.

Employees get hurt because we haven't set in place the necessary corrective measures and enforcement policies needed to keep employees safe. Employees will do what we want them to do, if we want them to do it badly enough. If they don't, we have the responsibility to change their behavior or change their employment.

What it takes to keep employees from getting hurt:

- * Total Management Commitment to the company's Safety Program
- * Safety established as one of the Top Key Management Priorities
- * Supervisors and Employees held accountable for safety
- * Clear written Safe Procedures
- * Effective Safety Training
- * Safe Tools and Equipment
- * Regular Safety Audits to ensure safe working conditions
- * Regular observations of employee work practices
- * Employee involvement in the Safety Program
- * Recognition and reward for safe work performance
- * Clear Safe Work Rules established and communicated to all employees
- * Enforcement of Safe Work Practices
- * No excuses for allowing an employee to work unsafely

If you establish a Safety Culture, make safety a top priority, communicate this clearly and your policies religiously, you will eliminate most of the reasons why employees get hurt. Accidents don't happen by accident they are caused. Eliminate the causes and you will eliminate accidents and the reason why employees get hurt.

If you have any questions or need any assistance with your Safety Program, please give me a call at 1-800-356-1274.