

How Accidents Happen: Personal Factors

The National Safety Council estimates that up to 80% of workplace accidents involve “unsafe acts.” Few people intentionally harm themselves at work; instead, injuries may happen when they take risky shortcuts, become complacent, or are distracted. Here are guidelines to reduce these and other hazards.

Distractions: You know distracted driving leads to accidents on the road. Paying attention to a phone, a conversation, or something across the room instead of the task you’re working on can contribute to accidents. If something draws your attention, stop what you’re doing until you can concentrate again.

Shortcuts: Step-by-step instructions are in place to make sure a job is done right. You may want to overlook something when you have a short timeline. But skipping part of a process can lead to unexpected trouble. If you don’t feel you have enough time to accomplish a task, talk with your supervisor about improving the workflow.

Complacency: This is better known as, “This is how I always do it.” Just because something has worked in the past doesn’t mean it will always work that way. It might not even be the most effective way to do something. Always use safe work practices so the one time your procedure goes wrong, you or someone else won’t be hurt.

Ignoring Safety Rules or Procedures: It’s easy to think, “I’m careful, it won’t happen to me.” But even with all the precautions in the world, it could happen to you. You need to know what to do to make sure that if something does happen, you will be protected.

Incomplete Instructions: This is especially important for new employees, when working at a new job, or for a new task. If you don’t feel like you were given full instructions or training for your role, let someone know so you can get the support you need.

Planning: Think through how to accomplish a task before you start. This is especially helpful for jobs you don’t do very often, so you don’t get delayed in the middle of an activity trying to decide on your next step. This is especially important for infrequent tasks, or when the job changes.

Memory: “What was that rule on the way to set up a ladder? I can’t remember, but this feels right.” Relying on memory without confirming you’re using the right method to achieve your goal often leads to accidents. Take a minute to find instructions or ask someone if you can’t remember the way to do something.

Slow down – Plan – Avoid distractions – Avoid complacency