Avoid Harmful Horseplay



WHAT'S AT STAKE

Horseplay is rough play, practical jokes and other physical humor which can endanger workers. Horseplay at work is also linked to bullying behavior. In those cases, jokes are actually harassment targeting new workers or others who, in someone's opinion, do not fit in with the crew.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

A victim's explosive anger is one danger arising from horseplay. Even if a certain prank doesn't cause physical injury, it could bring dangerous retaliation. Workplace "joking" has resulted in fatally stabbed jokers. And even the most light-hearted horseplay can distract workers for a second and cost someone a serious injury. Every year people are injured during horseplay. "I'm sorry" can't bring back a finger, an eye or a life.

EXAMPLES

Vandalism is closely linked to horseplay as destruction of property for a prank or more malicious reasons. Consider the traffic fatality in which three innocent people were killed when the vehicle in which they were riding smashed into a transport truck. Why? Pranksters had deliberately knocked down a stop sign at a rural intersection. Whoever did that probably thought they were being pretty funny at the time.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Think of victim
Be aware of how practical jokes affect the victim – endangering, frightening and belittling him or her. Treat others how you would like to be treated.

Don't play
If someone plays a practical joke on you or invites you to join in horseplay, tell him it's dangerous and not fitting in the workplace. Remember that any workplace tool can be a lethal weapon if misused, even in fun. Don't engage in this type of activity.

Discourage it
Discourage your fellow workers from "acting up" on the job.

Train early

Help influence and train new and young workers to avoid horseplay and stick to the rules. Warn them that there may be times when the same-old, same-old atmosphere at work seems to call for a little “lightening up,” but the cost of following that temptation can quickly become heartbreakingly heavy.

No audience
Ignoring horseplay is sometimes a smart way to discourage it.

Report it
The best way to stop horseplay, however, is to report any worker who refuses to listen to reason about practical jokes and horseplay. It may cost that person a job, but it could save a life.

FINAL WORD

It makes no difference what the motive is for horseplay – boredom, humor or deliberate cruelty. The result is the same: Horseplay hurts.