Communicating Health and Safety Concerns to Management



WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Proper communication is crucial for a job to run smoothly and efficiently. Recognizing the communication tools for work tasks and the work environment is important to ensure the proper messages are being received.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Proper communication and safety go hand in hand. If there is no communication for given work tasks then safety is missing.

There are many other ways that safety is communicated in the workplace. Verbal communication is very important. When you see a situation where someone could be hurt or there could be property loss you should always speak up. Have a conversation with the individuals involved in the task to voice your concerns. **Involve the right personnel** to correct a situation before an injury occurs.

It matters to communicate effectively

Failure to communicate safety information effectively can have serious negative consequences, including:

- Accidents, injuries, and illness.
- Lost workdays.
- Reduced productivity and delays.
- Risk-taking by employees.
- Inability to comply with regulations.
- Higher workers' compensation and health insurance costs.
- Damage to materials, equipment, or your facility (for example, in a workplace fire caused by carelessness or lack of knowledge).
- Risks to community and environment (for example, in a release or improper disposal of hazardous chemicals).

Communication Barriers

Unfortunately, numerous obstacles can cause communication to break down.

Example

- If too much information is being communicated all at once, it can be hard for employees to absorb all those different messages at one time.
- If your message lacks clarity, is confusing or ambiguous, what a worker actually hears might be quite different from what you intended to say.
- If expectations are not clearly defined, you may be unpleasantly surprised by the results.
- It is important to know and express what you expect to happen as a result of your communication.
- If you communicate a safety message without taking the time to listen carefully to the response of employees, the communication is incomplete. Remember, you have to speak and listen for communication to be successful.
- If you don’t take employees’ concerns and priorities into account, they might not listen to what you have to say.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

KEYS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Communicating occupational safety and health information effectively is crucial to preventing employee injuries and illness.

Effective safety communication is:

1. It flows both ways. You speak about safety and you listen to employees’ concerns and suggestions.
2. It tells employees what they need to know to work safely under all conditions.
3. It focuses on the exchange of ideas and information to improve workplace safety and prevent accidents and illness.
4. It allows you to interact successfully with employees and spread your safety message to all who need to hear it.

HOW TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

Everything we do is communication. Research studies point to 70% of workplace mistakes being caused by poor communication.

How we start our message often determines the result.

People quickly determine the meaning of our message and whether they will be receptive at the beginning. We only have a short time to get our messages across:

- 2 minutes when we are face to face
- 30 seconds on the telephone
- 10 – 15 seconds by voice mail.

The message is the safety information you want to transfer from your head into the minds and hearts of your employees.

- Before you speak, think carefully about what you want to say. Be as clear as possible about each of the points you want to make.
- Organize your thoughts into a logical sequence for communication.
- Consider your expectations. Do you expect employees to take some action as a result of what you tell them? If so, be sure to be clear about what that action is.
- Keep your communications simple. One safety message at a time, simply and directly stated, is more likely to be heard and understood.
- Be as precise as possible. Use concrete language and examples to explain what

you mean so that you leave no room for misinterpretation.
- Be concise. Say only what needs to be said to get your point across. A lot of extra words will only confuse the issue.
- Demonstrate when appropriate. Employees generally learn better and retain more of the safety information they see and hear.
- Repeat your message as needed. Studies show that a safety message often needs to be repeated on several different occasions to get through to employees.

THE 10 COMMANDMENTS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

These 10 tips can help your company establish a coherent safety message and increase fall safety awareness in your organization. The good news is that these are easy tips to follow and implement in your company. While it may take some time for everyone to learn and follow the rules, putting some of these ideas into practice will help to create a safer work environment for everyone.

1. **Send an Email or Newsletter**– If your employees have a company email address, make sure that everyone gets an email outlining safety standards at least once a month. Another way is mailing a newsletter to the address of every employee; you can include one with their pay stub as well.
2. **Post Signage Throughout the Workplace**– Place a sign where employees punch in, in break rooms, around equipment and any other high frequent areas. Be creative! Use video and other mediums to help reinforce standards.
3. **Take Pictures of Safe Actions**– A picture is worth a thousand words. Make it perfectly clear what the expectations are by taking pictures of employees demonstrating proper practices. Include these in your newsletters and emails.
4. **Hold Meetings (Toolbox Talks)**– To ensure that everyone is getting the message, hold small-group meetings that are mandatory for all employees. Make Toolbox Talks a part of the daily routine to review and discuss safety standards.
5. **Require Appropriate Training**– If you send people out untrained, you are communicating that safety doesn’t matter. People learn more from the workplace culture than from the signs that are posted. Create a culture of safety in the workplace by properly training your employees.
6. **Safety Comment Cards**– Encourage employees to hold each other accountable and spot unexpected hazards by providing safety comment cards. You could also include a form on your company’s Intranet to make it easier for people to access.
7. **Make it Part of the Employee Review Process**– Safety policies are not a one-and-done concern. It’s important to continually prioritize safety at the workplace and a great way to do that is by including a “refresher course” in an employee review.
8. **Invest in Proper Safety Gear**– Communicate priority in your safety budget. If you are buying the cheapest safety harnesses and glasses, it’s not a wonder why people don’t want to wear them! Put an emphasis on safety by buying quality gear that is comfortable and that people will want to wear.
9. **Routine Safety Checks**– Supervisors should walk around the premises on a regular basis to do fall safety checks. This will make it more likely to spot unprotected hazards that need to be secured while looking out for employees to make sure they’re implementing best practices. If you see unsafe behavior, it needs to be corrected at that very moment. It can’t afford to wait.
10. **Share Case Studies or Incident Reports**– Put the reality behind the need for safety by sharing events about real people who have been affected by insufficient safety measures.

FINAL WORD

Recognize all the different tools used in the workplace to communicate a safety message. When communication is not used to its fullest potential there can be an increased chance for injury. Never be afraid to speak up when it comes to safety on the job.