



Back To Work, Back To Safety

Distraction, falling out of routine, reporting for work exhausted, forgetting about common hazards, not being aware of workplace changes, frustration, poor job planning and organization, depression and mood swings are all common contributors to workplace incidents after employees spend time away from work. Learn how to avoid the pitfalls workers experience when they return from holiday, vacation or other absence.

IMPORTANCE OF COMING BACK TO SAFETY AFTER AN ABSENCE

- Many jobs share the fact that a certain set of skills are needed to perform them safely, specifically safety skills. Safety skills, just like other skills, can erode over time.
- Surprisingly, it doesn't take much time away from work for us to begin to lose our good safety habits we have worked so hard to develop.

REESTABLISHING A GOOD SAFETY ROUTINE

- Some people don't realize it, but safety is a routine, a routine that can be easily broken by time away from work and reestablishing a good safety routine starts at home.
- A good safety routine starts with getting the proper amount of sleep prior to going to work. This can be especially hard as holidays, vacations or absences from work.
- Returning to a normal home routine is one key to returning to a normal work routine also.

RECALLING SPECIFIC HAZARDS WHEN RETURNING TO WORK

- To have a less painful transition back to work, we need to take a moment and recall the hazards we will encounter as we enter and travel about our workplace.
- A good time to do this may be just prior to exiting your vehicle in the parking lot. On the first day back from an absence, take a deep breath and recall any specific hazards unique to your organization or facility.
- Of course, a simple slip or fall is the most likely incident faced by a worker moving about a facility, and those who have been away from work may be at even greater risk.
- It's always important to scan your path of travel for hazards; it's even more important after you have been away from work: the objects and obstacles you were used to may have been moved, new items may be stored



in areas you are not expecting and walkways and safe travel areas you have been used to may have been rerouted.

- After being away from work, you really don't know what to expect when you get back. That's why you must use an abundance of caution while moving about the facility.

REESTABLISHING GOOD SAFETY HABITS BEFORE STARTING YOUR WORK

- After time away from work, it takes time to get back up to speed.
- If your job requires the use of power tools, lifting heavy objects, operating heavy equipment, or places you near rotating parts, think through the movement of materials and the placement of your hands prior to starting the task.
- Understand that these movements may have been second nature to you before but will now require forethought and a slower pace until your skills become fine-tuned again.

SIMPLE STEPS FOR GETTING BACK INTO THE GROOVE OF WORKING SAFELY

- Getting back into the groove of working safely is not always easy. It's important to recognize when you are getting behind in your work, frustrated or just feeling "out of sorts." Typically, when things are "not going right"; that's an indication that things are about to "go wrong."
- When you are feeling "out of sorts," don't double down on the danger by trying to work faster or by continuing to work in an unfamiliar way; take a break instead.
- Step away from your work and think through the steps of your job. Envision how you have successfully performed actions you normally take and figure out what is different now.
- Review material lists, drawings or work procedures to help you recall the proper and safe way to perform your job.

SUMMARY

- Vacations and holidays can be expensive. Don't add to those costs by allowing yourself to be injured at work upon your return. Whether you have been gone for a month, a week, or simply for the weekend, be aware that your safety skills, work habits and even your attitude may need to be brought back up to speed. Being away from work can be fun, exhausting, stressful, but coming back to work must only be one thing to everyone: safe.