



Don't Bet Your Life On It

When workers begin their jobs each day, they aren't planning to gamble their lives away by committing unsafe acts. Somewhere along the way, however, some employees make a choice or decision to risk their lives by bypassing a safety rule or procedure. Will their gambles pay off? Don't bet on it.

Electrical incident: Frank and another electrical worker were servicing an electrical motor. They had turned off the power switch, but didn't lock it out. When his co-worker suggested that they test to make sure the power was off, Frank responded "Look, I've been doing this for 20 years; I know which switch feeds the motor." When they completed the task, Frank said "When you've been doing this job as long as me, you just know which switch feeds which panel. It's like second nature to me. Don't worry; one day you'll know how."

Sometime later, Frank's co-worker and a new electrical worker were performing a similar task. The new worker asked "What about checking the power?" The experienced worker replied, "Don't worry about it; I know what's what," but he was electrocuted when he reached into the electrical panel with a screwdriver.

Conclusions Drawn from this incident:

- Many risk takers believe that their skill and experience allow them to sidestep safe work practices and procedures. Sometimes they are successful, which only reinforces this errant belief.
- Frank's decision not to follow procedure and verify the equipment was de-energized stemmed from a false sense of security based on his years of experience. We need to understand that experience alone can't keep us safe and our skill has nothing to do with our safety.
- When experienced workers ignore safe work practices, less-experienced workers are less likely to continue to follow the proper procedures.
- An interesting statistic shows that incident rates are highest among new workers. Then they drop off as the workers gain experience, only to rise again as their years of experience increase. This is a cycle that must be broken and underscores why all workers, no matter their experience, must remain vigilant about following safe work practices each, and every time.

Confined space incident: Smitty and a co-worker were preparing to replace a pump filter in a tank on the plant grounds. When the co-worker proposed going to get the paperwork necessary for entering the confined space, Smitty replied, "Are you nuts? That will take forever; I promised my wife we'd be on time for dinner." Despite his co-worker's concerns about testing the air and obtaining an entry permit, Smitty entered the tank and began



to service the pump. Soon he was overcome by a poisonous gas. As his training prohibited him from entering the space to help, his co-worker radioed for help while he watched Smitty die.

Conclusions drawn from this incident:

- When you find yourself pressed for time and tempted to take a risk, take a moment to stop and consider what is at stake.
- Smitty said he was in a hurry, but it may be more appropriate to say he was distracted. He let something totally unrelated to his job task determine his ability to perform that task safely.
- Rushing to finish a job is a symptom of working while distracted and should be a warning sign that you need to slow down and consider your safety.
- Don't bet on being able to perform your job safely while rushing or being inattentive. Take a moment and make sure you are properly focused before beginning each new job task.

Fall incident: Two maintenance workers were preparing to perform a maintenance task on an elevated work platform. As they tied off their fall protection to a conduit pipe, one of the workers asked, "Do you think it will hold?" His co-worker replied, "What does it matter? I don't intend to fall. If you're scared, you just stay there and hand me the tools." He then climbed over the platform railing and reached to get his tools from the other worker. When he bobbed them during the exchange, he reached out to try and catch them. This caused him to lose his balance and fall from the platform. The conduit he was tied off to ripped away from the ceiling and he fell to his death.

Conclusions drawn from this incident:

- There is no room in the workplace for the type of dangerous attitude displayed by the worker who fell. The company wants you to work safely, period.
- Don't make the mistake of believing that your unsafe behavior makes you better or more effective than others. It just makes you dangerous.
- This is the same type of attitude that leads to various types of horseplay or even pranks that often end in injury.
- If you think taking chances, playing pranks or participating in horseplay is a good way to be the center of attention, don't bet on it.

There are countless examples of choices we must make each day that affect our safety. Each of these situations is a chance for you to make an important choice. You can decide that your life, your hopes and your dreams are



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too important to leave to chance. Make good choices when it comes to your personal safety and realize that when you follow safe work practices and procedures, everyone wins—you, the company and your loved ones.