

Toolbox Talk: Hazard Awareness in the Workplace

We've all heard the saying, "It's the little things that count." This holds especially true when it comes to workplace safety. While we've been trained to be vigilant about the big hazards—like heavy machinery, toxic substances, and machine guarding—the smaller, seemingly insignificant risks can also lead to serious injuries if overlooked.

The Impact of Overlooking Small Hazards

One company experienced a significant rise in accidents over three months. Naturally, management assumed the problem lay with high-hazard areas like heavy machinery, ventilation systems, or toxic chemicals. However, upon inspection, all the major systems were in good order—machines were properly guarded, chemicals were correctly labeled and stored, and safety equipment was functioning well.



The real issue stemmed from a series of "little things" that had been ignored until they led to injuries.

For instance:

- **A Puddle of Oil:** A small oil spill from a leaking forklift was left untreated because it seemed too minor to worry about. Unfortunately, it was enough to cause an employee to slip and fall.
- **A Box Left on the Floor:** A box of supplies was left in a walkway instead of being properly stored. After being walked around multiple times, someone eventually tripped over it, leading to injury.
- **A Ladder Placed in Front of a Door:** A ladder was temporarily placed in front of an outward-opening door to change a light bulb. Another worker opened the door, knocking the ladder over and injuring both workers.

These incidents occurred because the workers involved didn't perceive these minor hazards as serious threats. They were focused on avoiding major dangers, like working on energized electrical

equipment or bypassing machine guards, but they overlooked the smaller risks that also pose significant dangers.

The Importance of Addressing “Little Things”

It’s easy to have good intentions—planning to report a defective tool, a damaged extension cord, or a wobbly ladder—but sometimes we forget or don’t make the time. However, neglecting these “little things” can result in serious injuries for ourselves or others.

Minor injuries, like a small scratch or a speck of dust in the eye, can also escalate into bigger problems if not treated promptly. For instance, a small scratch can become infected, and dust in the eye can cause severe damage if left unattended. Always report even minor injuries and seek appropriate first aid.

Summary

In safety, the little things truly do count. While it’s crucial to remain aware of major hazards, we must also pay attention to the smaller, seemingly minor risks in our environment. By addressing these potential hazards promptly—whether it’s cleaning up a small spill, properly storing supplies, or reporting faulty equipment—we can prevent serious injuries. Taking a few minutes to focus on these details can make a significant difference in keeping ourselves and our coworkers safe.

