



Loss Control Insight

Complacency in the Workplace

Many workplaces have invested heavily in safe work practices and created conditions where workers feel safe, yet the risk of injury is still high due to a poorly recognized factor: complacency.



Complacency can be defined as self-satisfaction, especially when accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies. Complacency is extremely dangerous in the workplace. We get so used to things being done the same way that we do not always look at the hazards in our surroundings.

Even for workers who are well trained in safe work practices, it's easy to get too comfortable with job risks and get distracted from the task at hand. Because you feel safe or believe your safe work practices are ingrained or automatic, you may relax your guard.

Studies show that even a brief distraction or loss of focus—just 3 seconds—doubles the likelihood that workers will commit an error. When they return their attention to the task, they may do the next task incorrectly or out of sequence. Even just slightly longer distractions—4 to 5 seconds—triple the chances of an error. For highly hazardous tasks, errors can be

very costly in terms of both life and property.

Watch for indicators that you or coworkers are distracted. There are three types of at-risk behaviors to watch for: deliberate, unintentional, and habitual.

Deliberate is the easiest to spot, such as taking a shortcut through a known restricted or high-hazard area. Unintentional behavior is inadvertently walking into a restricted area while preoccupied or otherwise distracted. An indicator of at-risk behavior or distraction due to habit is boredom, when a worker stops thinking a high-hazard task is hazardous after he or she has done it safely many times.

If you read between the lines of incident reports, you may see that workers involved in the incidents had become complacent about safety. When workers begin to work in auto-pilot mode, and stop paying attention to what they are doing, that can lead to taking short cuts and taking risks.

Complacency is a safety hazard that can compromise a workplace that looks on the surface like it's working safely. If you've relaxed your guard, or you see coworkers relax their guard, it's time to ask what you can do to bring everybody's minds back to the task at hand.

If employees aren't thinking about what could go wrong every day, all day while they work, they are not completing the task safely. Workers need to be trained to think ahead as they approach each task and consider:

- What they are working with
- What they will be doing
- Where they will be going
- What could go wrong

Encourage employees to examine equipment, procedures and the hazards that may exist. They need to focus physically and mentally on their work, no matter how many times they may have done the same job in the past.