

# Talks **ZONE**

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## Complacency can be dangerous

**W**hile unsafe conditions often cause workplace deaths and injuries, a great many more are the result of unsafe acts.

Such acts might occur because a person is unaware of safe procedures and precautions, but in too many cases the person has fallen victim to complacency.

One dictionary definition of complacency is “a feeling of quiet pleasure or security, often while unaware of some potential danger, defect, or the like; self-satisfaction or smug satisfaction with an existing situation, condition, etc.”

Although pleasure and smugness might not apply to you, the tendency to ignore or downplay potential danger is real. As time goes by with no problems, not even a close call, the risk of complacency increases.

Almost all jobs are repetitive in nature, and the more we repeat what we are doing, the greater the chance of becoming complacent — without even realizing it.

There is no sure-fire cure for complacency. Like a chronic illness, it requires constant attention to prevent it from ruining your life or someone else's.

One way to combat complacency is to make safety a habit; to develop and maintain an attitude that strives to be constantly aware of what could go wrong.

This can be easier said than done, of course. But does a serious incident have to happen before we give ourselves a reality check and realize our attitudes need a big adjustment?

Let's hope not. In fact, now is as good a time as any for a checkup. Ask yourself these questions:

- Are you always focused on the task(s) at hand when you're on the job?



- Do you follow every step in every job every time?
- Do you manage your time so you don't have to cut corners?
- Do you know and follow all safety rules?
- Do you know what to do in an emergency?
- Do you always use the required personal protective equipment?
- Do you report any safety hazards you can't fix?
- Can you name the safest person at your workplace? Is it you?

Remember, attitude affects behavior. A good attitude means having the strength to do the right thing and it means following proper safety procedures.

If you have a positive attitude, odds are you will exhibit safe behavior. A negative attitude toward safety — and that includes complacency — can cause conflict, stress and, ultimately, an accident. It can make people around you feel uneasy and be dangerously distracted. Think hard about how your job performance affects your co-workers.

You can combat your own complacency

by watching the actions of others while they work. This not only raises your awareness, it might do it for them if you share the observations you made.

Here are some more ways to keep safety top-of-mind:

- Know the hazards. It's impossible to avoid all hazards, but you can be smart about your decisions. Don't take chances with anyone's safety.
  - Always use the proper tools and equipment for the job. Don't substitute for the sake of speed or convenience.
  - Regularly inspect tools/equipment to make sure they are in good repair.
  - Make sure your work laid out to provide safe completion of the job.
  - Make sure the materials being used are safe, and whether additional personal protective equipment might be required.
  - Keep all necessary equipment guards in place and follow all lockout/tagout procedures for repairs, maintenance and emergency shutdown.
  - Keep your surroundings clean, orderly and free from hazards.
  - Clean up spills and debris promptly or report them to the appropriate person.
- You might even consider taking your non-complacent attitude to the next level by becoming more involved in promoting and improving safety in your workplace.
- This can be done by serving on safety committees, planning and leading a safety meeting, and by participating in incident investigations and facility walk-throughs.

The material contained in this document has been prepared from sources believed to be accurate and reliable. Application of this information to a specific worksite should be reviewed by a safety professional. Anyone making use of the information set forth herein does so at their own risk and assumes any and all liability arising therefrom. Specific medical advice should be obtained through consultation with a physician or other trained health care practitioner.

## The Quiz

These questions are meant to help you remember what was discussed today — not to test your patience or challenge your intelligence. The answers are at the bottom of the page. Cover them up, and complete the quiz as quickly as you can.

1. Unsafe acts are the leading cause of workplace injuries and property damage.  
TRUE \_\_\_\_ FALSE \_\_\_\_
2. Can worker complacency lead to unsafe acts?  
YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_
3. Overcoming complacency requires:
  - A. Constant effort.
  - B. Proper equipment.
  - C. Safe work procedures.
  - D. Cooperation by co-workers.
  - E. None of the above.
4. A serious incident is the best way to correct unsafe situations.  
TRUE \_\_\_\_ FALSE \_\_\_\_
5. Which of these are indications of worker complacency:
  - A. Not always being focused on the task at hand.
  - B. Following all required safety precautions.
  - C. Not using all required personal protective equipment.
  - D. Ignoring close calls.
6. Observing the actions of co-workers can be a good way to combat complacency.  
TRUE \_\_\_\_ FALSE \_\_\_\_
7. Which of these are steps usually taken to maintain a positive attitude toward safety:
  - A. Know the hazards of your job and be vigilant for hidden ones.
  - B. Do not substitute improper tools for the sake of speed or convenience.
  - C. Keep your surroundings free of clutter.
  - D. All of the above.
8. Does your workplace encourage employees to help promote and improve safety?  
YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_ DON'T KNOW \_\_\_\_

ANSWERS: 1. True, 2. Yes, 3. A, 4. False, 5. A, C, and D, 6. True, 7. D, 8. Your answer

## Hold These Thoughts

Call it a close call, a near miss or a narrow escape, there are compelling reasons not to ignore an unplanned event that didn't result in injury, illness or damage — but had the potential to do so.

Unfortunately, such events often are ignored. Lessons go unlearned and another event occurs that does cause harm. In some instances, complacency is the reason why.

For example, workers might put up with clutter even when others stumble over it without falling. Then someone does fall, breaking an ankle in the process.

There can be much more serious warnings. Dealing with a potentially hazardous situation or reporting it immediately might seem to be an obvious solution, but it can be very difficult to get everyone to take close calls seriously.

Aside from complacency, there are other reasons why people are reluctant to report them:

- There is no system for doing so.
- Workers believe their supervisors will hold such reporting against them.
- Reporting generates additional work.
- Once reported nothing is done to address or correct what caused the close call.
- Close calls are so frequent they become commonplace and part of the everyday work life.
- Employees may fear a possible job loss or be penalized if they are found to be a contributing factor of the near miss incident.
- Workers believe being safe in the workplace includes being lucky.

It is impossible to completely engineer out all risks. Everyone must continue to help identify hidden or unexpected risks and develop ways to minimize the exposure. Reporting and investigating close calls is a critical part of this process.

## For the Record

Date of Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Finish Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

In Attendance:


## Tips for Safety Meeting Leaders

**Reach conclusion or agreement.** A safety meeting usually seems more satisfactory if you agree on a course of action. This action can be to improve or correct a situation. Make plans to get whatever information is needed to resolve a question. It is very important that you provide answers to employees' questions as soon as possible. Even if the answers are unpopular, at least you've taken the trouble to find them out.

**Get your people involved.** Ask them for a short presentation about safety in relation to their particular work task. There's no stress about them

needing to conduct huge amounts of research, because they know their job. Give them a time frame and allow them to be as imaginative and 'out there' as they want to be. It's during these times you'll hear 'pearls'. The number of workers who have good ideas on improving safety, but haven't spoken up just might surprise you.

**Credit where it's due.** Employees who have shown initiative by asking questions or coming up with good ideas should be given a word of praise either at the meeting or when you pass their workstations.

**Note: *TalksZone* safety meetings are not intended to take the place of your own safety procedures. Always consult and/or review your procedures before attempting any work.**