

## Repetition in Safety Training. It works... it works... it works...

Because learning speeds and styles differ, safety trainers should build repetition and reinforcement into their programs. There are ways to do it without boring or annoying students.

*HeadOn. Apply directly to the forehead!*

*HeadOn. Apply directly to the forehead!*

*HeadOn. Apply directly...*

OK, we'll stop before we apply a *headache* directly to your forehead. But we're repeating one of America's most annoying TV ads (even the makers of HeadOn® admit it!) to make a point about safety training: When you're trying to convince someone to do something, repetition works.

It worked for HeadOn, getting people to buy more than 6 million tubes of the stuff (at \$8 apiece) once the ad started airing. And it will work for you in getting your workers to remember to follow safety procedures that may save all of you a headache!

### Why does it work? Here are some reasons:

**Trainees learn at different rates.** It's a fact that not everyone picks up new information the same way. Some may get things the first time you tell or show them. Others may need several exposures to the material. The trick in working with a group is to use the more agile learners to help the rest, while you supervise them all.

**Trainees learn in different modes.** Educators have known this for a long time: Some people are visual learners, others audio-oriented, still others process new information best by tactile means, actually touching or doing a new task. For this reason, you should not only repeat the material but also vary the ways you present it. A toolbox talk may work for some. Others need to see a PowerPoint® or video. Still others need to do the task.

**Don't just do what I say, do what I do.** To ensure that all learners correctly pick up a new procedure—such as how to safely operate equipment or utilize PPE—demonstrate it several times. Then let students do it themselves, while you coach and provide feedback.

**Reinforcement Rocks!** Few TV advertisers show their ad just once. Instead, their commercials run repeatedly day after day, at spaced intervals, as much as their budgets will allow. Print advertisers have similarly learned it can be more effective to run a small ad day after day in the newspapers rather than one big full-page ad only once. Trainers call this "reinforcement," and there's an important reason it's needed:

"Trainees can remember 90 percent of what they've learned an hour after training," says expert trainer Bob Pike, as quoted in *OSHA Compliance Advisor*. They then remember "50 percent after a day, 25 percent after 2 days, and only 10 percent after 30 days." That's why Pike and others say subject matter needs to be revisited *6 times* before it can be considered to be truly learned.

Of course, unlike those annoying commercials that are always the same, your best strategy in revisiting topics is to change your approach each time—the same material, but with a new spin. Try some new visuals, have new real-life examples, have different types of demonstrations, or even call in someone different to do the training. But the basic principle of repeating the key information will still be there. Or, as HeadOn might put it: Repetition: apply directly to your employees. Because it works ... it works ... it works.