



# 5 Minute Safety Meetings

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## Preventing Repeat Accidents

### Where do most repeat accidents happen?

Keep an eye on these “hot spots”:

- High-risk jobs involving hazardous chemicals and dangerous equipment.
- High-stress jobs without enough built-in relief in the form of breaks and support.
- Repetitive jobs that can cause musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs).
- Seasonal jobs that involve periodic high-volume work, which can create accident clusters.
- Repeat injuries from prior workplace or off-the-job injuries that didn't heal properly, perhaps because of returning to work too early.
- Referred injuries from overcompensation of other parts of the body for an area that was previously injured—for example, hip problems from adjusting the gait to accommodate a knee injury.

### Who's most often involved?

Safety experts believe that about 20 percent of workers cause 80 percent of accidents. So it would seem that some employees truly are “accident prone.” Who are these employees? Irresponsible, aggressive, and easily distractible people head the list. In addition, employees who exhibit the following traits are frequently involved in repeat accidents:

- Stoic “tough guys,” who work through any injury or illness and consider it a sign of weakness to do otherwise
- Risk takers, who think accidents happen to other people and who are often young and male
- Angry people, who let emotions distract them from their work because, as the old saying goes, they are “so angry they can't see straight”
- Shy workers, who don't want to draw attention to themselves by reporting an incident or near miss
- Tired people, including shift-workers, whose lifestyles don't give them enough energy or alertness to work safely
- Disinterested workers, who frankly don't give a damn about the job and simply don't care enough to be careful

### What are the main contributing factors?

Here are the three main factors that contribute to repeat accidents:

- **Human** factors include an employee's:
  - Lack of job skills and knowledge.
  - Unsafe work style/habits (rushing, careless, inattentive).
  - Poor judgment (taking shortcuts, skipping steps, not bothering with personal protective equipment (PPE)).
  - Lack of physical fitness (overweight and out of shape).
  - Distracting personal problems.
- **Jobsite** factors include:
  - Not having the right equipment for the job or equipment in poor condition.
  - Workers fitted to jobs rather than jobs fitted to workers.
  - Improperly laid out work spaces that don't provide ease of movement and worker comfort.
  - Inadequately managed work flow resulting in workload spikes and overloads.
  - Poorly lit, loud, over- or under-heated work environments.
- **Safety culture** factors include:
  - An environment in which safety and health aren't priorities and safe behavior isn't reinforced and rewarded.



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- Accident investigations that don't get to the root causes of accidents and fail to correct safety problems to prevent future accidents.
- Failure to choose the right people for the job and failure to ensure that staffing levels are always adequate to prevent work overload and unreasonable production schedules.
- Insufficient safety training so that employees don't understand hazards or don't have the skills and knowledge they need to do the job safely.
- Equipment that isn't always in safe operating condition, failure to schedule routine maintenance and repairs, and use of more hazardous materials when less hazardous ones could be substituted.
- Failure of supervision to ensure that employees are wearing required PPE and following safe work practices.

## **Suggestions from the OSHA Required Training for Supervisors monthly newsletter**

Armed with information about the people and places most likely to be involved in repeat accidents, as well as some contributing factors, we're ready to move on to strategies for stopping them. Here are some suggestions from the OSHA Required Training for Supervisors monthly newsletter:

- Make safety a top priority. Talk about safety, conduct safety audits, and encourage suggestions from employees for improving safety.
- Set a goal to eliminate repeat accidents. Make sure all of your employees—not just those involved in an accident—understand the causes of prior accidents and the steps they need to take to avoid a repeat.
- Train as if their lives depended on it—because they do! Your employees' safety on the job depends on their skills, knowledge, awareness, and judgment. Training strengthens and develops all these safety essentials.
- Reinforce safe behavior. Get out there among your employees every day and praise those who are working safely. Talk to those who are taking risks and redirect them into following safe procedures. Consider retraining those whose performance indicates a lack of requisite safety skills or knowledge.
- Don't use discipline without also offering help. You may need to resort to discipline when coaching and counseling fail to correct unsafe behavior. But don't discipline without also providing support and feedback about safe performance.
- Emphasize hazard detection and reporting. Just because something was OK yesterday doesn't mean it hasn't become a hazard today. Keep alert and make sure your employees keep their eyes open, too.
- Investigate every incident. Whether it was a near miss or an accident that caused injuries and damage, investigate until you find the cause and correct it.

We've said it before and we'll say it again: Safety attitude is the key to a safe workplace. But it doesn't happen overnight, and the message needs to be repeatedly reinforced—preferably in a variety of ways and formats.