

## **BACK TO WORK, BACK TO SAFETY, *Reestablishing Safety Habits After Time Away From Work***

This easy-to-use Leader's Guide is provided to assist in conducting a successful presentation. Featured are:

**INTRODUCTION:** A brief description of the program and the subject that it addresses.

**PROGRAM OUTLINE:** Summarizes the program content. If the program outline is discussed before the video is presented, the entire program will be more meaningful and successful.

**PREPARING FOR AND CONDUCTING THE PRESENTATION:** These sections will help you set up the training environment, help you relate the program to site-specific incidents, and provide program objectives for focusing your presentation.

**REVIEW QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:** Questions may be copied and given to participants to document how well they understood the information that was presented. Answers to the review questions are provided separately.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Distraction, falling out of routine, reporting for work exhausted, forgetting about common hazards, not being aware of workplace changes, frustration, poor job planning and organization, depression and mood swings are all common contributors to workplace incidents after employees spend time away from work. This program explains and illustrates each of these issues through a series of examples, testimonials and incident reenactments. Viewers will learn many valuable safety lessons about the pitfalls workers experience when they return from holiday, vacation or other absence.

### **PROGRAM OUTLINE**

#### **OPENING**

- In the opening of the program, several people are asked to perform a skill which they had developed in the past, but are now out of practice.
- After being asked to join a foursome that needed another member, a golfer declines the invitation because he hadn't played in a while and needed more practice.
- A skier urges her friends to take the expert trail at the slopes, but one friend replies that they had better continue to take the intermediate trail to get a feel for skiing again since it was their first day on the mountain in a while.
- A diver eager to get started tells his friend, "It's time to dive," but another diver says he would like to check the dive tables first to make sure surface intervals were right between dives.
- In each case, the person recognized that more remediation or practice was needed before the skill could be performed again at a high level.

#### **IMPORTANCE OF COMING BACK TO SAFETY AFTER AN ABSENCE**

- There is a good chance you may be a machine or equipment operator, a food-processing, factory or assembly line worker, a maintenance or operations worker, an electrician, a welder or other type of skilled tradesperson.
- Each of these and countless other jobs share the fact that a certain set of skills is needed to perform them safely, specifically safety skills. Safety skills, just like other skills, can erode over time.
- Surprisingly, it doesn't take much time away from work for us to begin to lose our good safety habits we have worked so hard to develop.

- When we return from being away from work, our mind is often distracted by what we experienced while we were gone.
- We often want to share our pleasant experiences with other workers and we tend to reflect privately on those experiences that aren't so pleasant.
- In either case, our off-job reflections can become a distraction. In a workplace full of hazards, being distracted places you at risk.

### **DISTRACTED WELDER SUFFERS EYE IRRITATION**

- Ty, a welder, and his sister moved their mother into a long-term care facility during a plant shut down. "It was very emotional and very stressful," he says.
- He adds that upon returning work, his mind was racing about insurance forms, medical documents, etc. as well as being strong for his sister, but he jumped right into his work by prepping some parts for welding.
- "Once the parts were set up, I immediately started welding, but I was suddenly blinded by the arc," says Ty.
- Normally, he did all of his grinding first and then turned on the auto-tint on his welding lens on helmet, but after being gone from work and being distracted by his personal issues, he was out of his routine and forgot to turn it on.
- "Now, my eyes weren't damaged," Ty concludes, "but they sure were irritated for a few days."

### **REESTABLISHING A GOOD SAFETY ROUTINE**

- Some people don't realize it, but safety is a routine, a routine that can be easily broken by time away from work and reestablishing a good safety routine starts at home.
- A good safety routine starts with getting the proper amount of sleep prior to going to work. This can be especially hard as holidays, vacations or family gatherings are winding down.
- It helps to have a definite plan so activities and fun can come to an end in time to restore normal order to your home environment.
- Returning to a normal home routine is one key to returning to a normal work routine also.
- Before leaving home to report to work, take a moment to clear your head of any lingering off-job issues and try to recall your standard routine of going to work.
- Envision putting on your seatbelt, the route you will drive to work, even the parking space in which you normally park. This simple memory game can help put you into a state of mind focused and ready for work.
- Every workplace has hazards that all workers must watch out for and be aware of as they travel about the facility. Workers who have been away from work for a few days may not be as in tune with those hazards as they had been in the past.
- There is definitely a flow to the movement of materials and equipment. It's fast-paced and you've always got to keep a watch and be aware of your surroundings.

### **EXHAUSTED WORKER STRUCK BY FORKLIFT**

- A plant worker returned to work and "was still dragging, trying to recover from the holidays." His family had been visiting from holidays and he hadn't gotten much sleep.

- On his first day back, he had gotten a cup of coffee and then decided to take a shortcut through the shipping area to reach his workstation.
- “I had just taken a sip of coffee and then, bam!” he says. “I walked right in front of a forklift carrying a large load. It knocked me flat.”
- “I guess that life’s way of telling me, ‘Holiday’s over; welcome back work’,” notes the worker.

### **RECALLING SPECIFIC HAZARDS WHEN RETURNING TO WORK**

- To have a less painful transition back to work, we need to take a moment and recall the hazards we will encounter as we enter and travel about our workplace.
- A good time to do this may be just prior to exiting your vehicle in the parking lot. On the first day back from an absence, take a deep breath and recall any specific hazards unique to your organization or facility.
- Of course, a simple slip or fall is the most likely incident faced by a worker moving about a facility, and those who have been away from work may be at even greater risk.
- It’s always important to scan your path of travel for hazards; it’s even more important after you have been away from work: the objects and obstacles you were used to may have been moved, new items may be stored in areas you are not expecting and walkways and safe travel areas you have been used to may have been rerouted.

### **INATTENTIVE PEDESTRIAN BREAKS ANKLE**

- “You know, I couldn’t believe it,” says an assembly line employee. “All I could think of was, ‘Really? I survive the holidays with my in-laws, and then I come back to work and break my ankle.’”
- She was reading a flyer about the company softball league when she turned a corner where an opening had always been and stepped into a cluster of storage crates.
- “I don’t know whose bright idea it was to turn that pass-through opening into a storage area, but I sure wasn’t expecting that,” says the worker.
- After being away from work, you really don’t know what to expect when you get back. That’s why you must use an abundance of caution while moving about the facility.

### **REESTABLISHING GOOD SAFETY HABITS BEFORE STARTING YOUR WORK**

- After time away from work, it takes time to get back up to speed. Recall the welder who forgot to correctly set his welding lens; his safety habits had eroded.
- The pedestrian who stepped in front of a moving forklift had lost the habit of looking both ways in traffic areas.
- In the same incident, the forklift driver who struck him had lost his habit of slowing down and sounding the horn at that same spot.
- Each of our jobs requires skill and focus to perform properly and safely. No matter which job you perform, after time away, always take a moment to review the critical steps of that job and the specific things you must do to stay safe.
- First, remind yourself of any protective equipment required to do the job, such as gloves, safety glasses or a face shield.
- If hearing protection is required in your work area, be sure you use it and install it properly.

- If your job requires the use of power tools, metal working machines or places you near rotating parts or in-running nip points, think through the movement of materials and the placement of your hands prior to starting the task.
- Understand that these movements may have been second nature to you before, but will now require forethought and a slower pace until your skills become fine-tuned again.

### **UNCLAMPED MATERIAL INJURES DRILL PRESS OPERATOR'S HAND**

- “I normally have a specific routine when I operate the drill press, but I'd just gotten back from vacation and couldn't seem to get organized,” says a drill press operator.
- During his first shift back, he was measuring the stock on the press, punching the mark, drilling the hole and then putting the stock on a cart. “I normally measure and punch all the stock on the fabrication table first,” he notes, “But like I said, on this first day back, I was a bit out of sorts.”
- While drilling, the bit got bound up in a piece of stock and it started to spin because the operator had forgotten to clamp it down. It struck the base of his thumb, causing a severe cut and damaged tendon.
- “Clamping the material is part of my standard routine, but nothing was routine about that day,” he concludes.

### **SIMPLE STEPS FOR GETTING BACK INTO THE GROOVE OF WORKING SAFELY**

- Getting back into the groove of working safely is not always easy. It's important to recognize when you are getting behind in your work, frustrated or just feeling “out of sorts.” Typically when things are “not going right”; that's an indication that things are about to “go wrong.”
- When you are feeling “out of sorts,” don't double down on the danger by trying to work faster or by continuing to work in an unfamiliar way; take a break instead.
- Step away from your work and think through the steps of your job. Envision how you have successfully performed actions you normally take and figure out what is different now.
- Take time to properly set up your work area and organize your tools and equipment so you can easily find what you need.
- Review material lists, drawings or work procedures to help you recall the proper and safe way to perform your job.
- Performing these simple steps after time away from work can help you get back on track.

### **REESTABLISHING A GOOD SAFETY ATTITUDE & LEVEL EMOTIONAL STATE**

- When we jump right into our work without taking time to regain our safety habits, injuries can quickly occur, but safety is not just about physical habits, staying safe is also about attitude and emotion.
- Our state of mind impacts our decision making, specifically our safety decision making.
- Maintaining a good safety attitude and level emotional state is also a habit that may need to be relearned after time away from work.
- Reestablishing a good workplace attitude may be easier for some of us than others.
- For some people, the holiday season can be joyous and euphoric; for others the holidays are filled with stress and chaos.

- Similarly, going on vacation can be fun but also exhausting; and, being away from work due to sickness or family issues can be emotionally draining and distracting.
- When we return to work, no matter the reason we are away and no matter what state of mind in which we find ourselves upon our return, we have to guard against being distracted when it comes to safety.
- This is because no matter your mood, the gears on our machines still turn, gravity is still in force, chemicals are still hazardous, certain items are still hot and certain areas are still loud. In other words, the hazards of our job remain, regardless of our mood or emotional state.

### **AVOIDING ALLOWING OUR STATE OF MIND TO JEOPARDIZE OUR SAFETY**

- Many people let their emotional state or mood affect their choices. This is true all the time, but we are especially vulnerable to this mistake after being away from work for an extended period of time.
- Perhaps you are not thrilled to be back at work and are in a funk because you are wishing you were still on vacation. Don't let that bad feeling prevent you from putting on your fall harness, or your hard hat or following that lockout procedure.
- Perhaps we are still feeling tired from an illness. Don't let that tiredness keep you from going to get the right tool for the job or taking the time to follow the process of getting a proper permit.
- Perhaps we are still feeling euphoric about our holiday and enjoying our goodtime memories. Don't let daydreaming about the past prevent you from concentrating on the task at hand.
- In other words, don't allow your state of mind upon returning from time away from work jeopardize your safety or the safety of your co-workers.

### **SKIPPED LOCKOUT PROCEDURE RESULTS IN TRAUMATIC HAND INJURY**

- A maintenance technician admits that he was distracted and didn't want to be at work after a dive trip to some islands. He said he was thought he was actually depressed the whole first week he was back at work.
- While servicing the drive train to a paper line, he decided not to lock out its multiple sources of power because he "simply didn't feel like doing it."
- "Like I said, I think I was depressed. In any case, I certainly had a bad attitude," says the technician. "I knew the paper stock had been cut off and was disconnected from the main line, so I figured it wouldn't start up anyway. Just as I was making the final adjustment, I heard a noise."
- "I'll tell you what, I just thought my vacation was expensive, but it wasn't until I brought my island time attitude back to work that the real costs kicked in," he adds, referring to his traumatic injury he suffered when the drive train on the paper started up and pulled his hand inside.

### **SUMMARY**

- Vacations and holidays can be expensive. Don't add to those costs by allowing yourself to be injured at work upon your return.
- Whether you have been gone for a month, a week, or simply for the weekend, be aware that your safety skills, work habits and even your attitude may need to be brought back to speed.
- Being away from work can be fun; being away from work can be exhausting; being away from work can be stressful; being away from work can be different things to different people, but coming back to work must only be one thing to everyone: safe.

## **PREPARE FOR THE SAFETY MEETING**

Review each section of this Leader's Guide as well as the program. Here are a few suggestions for using the program:

Make everyone aware of the importance the company places on health and safety and how each person must be an active member of the safety team.

Introduce the program. Play it without interruption. Review the program content by presenting the information in the program outline.

Copy the review questions included in this Leader's Guide and ask each participant to complete them.

Make an attendance record and have each participant sign the form. Maintain the attendance record and each participant's test paper as written documentation of the training performed.

Here are some suggestions for preparing your video equipment and the room or area you use:

Check the room or area for quietness, adequate ventilation and temperature, lighting and unobstructed access.

Check the seating arrangement and the audiovisual equipment to ensure that all participants will be able to see and hear the program.

## **CONDUCTING THE PRESENTATION**

Begin the meeting by welcoming the participants. Introduce yourself and give each person the opportunity to become acquainted if there are new people joining the training session.

Explain that the primary purpose of the program is to show viewers common pitfalls they can experience after being away from work and how they can prevent these issues from contributing to incidents and injuries.

Introduce the program. Play it without interruption. Review the program content by presenting the information in the program outline.

Lead discussions about specific hazards at your facility that could cause problems if an employee was distracted when returning to work from vacation, holiday or other absence.

After watching the program, the viewer will be able to explain the following:

- What pitfalls were experienced by workers in the program and how they could have been avoided;
- How to reestablish a good safety routine after spending time away from work;
- How to prepare for hazards to be encountered when returning to the job;
- What simple steps can be taken to get back into the groove of safety;
- Why employees must reestablish a good safety attitude and level emotional state when coming back to work.

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REVIEW QUIZ**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*The following questions are provided to check how well you understand the information presented during this program.*

1. It doesn't take much time away from work for us to begin to lose our good safety habits.
  - a. true
  - b. false
  
2. The welder who forgot to turn on the auto-tint on his welding lens suffered permanent eye damage.
  - a. true
  - b. false
  
3. A good safety routine starts with \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. clearing your head of any lingering off-job issues
  - b. recalling your standard routine of going to work
  - c. getting the proper amount of sleep before going to work
  
4. Why is it even more important to scan your path of travel for hazards when returning from an absence?
  - a. objects you were used to may have been moved
  - b. items may be stored in areas you aren't expecting
  - c. safe travel areas may have been rerouted
  - d. all above answers
  
5. There was nothing the forklift operator could have done to help avoid striking the pedestrian who had cut through the shipping area.
  - a. true
  - b. false
  
6. When reviewing the critical steps of a job and the steps needed to stay safe before starting a task, what is the first thing you should do?
  - a. think about the placement of your hands near moving machinery
  - b. remind yourself of any required personal protective equipment
  - c. make sure all guards and safety devices are installed properly on equipment
  
7. When you are frustrated or feeling "out of sorts" on the job, you should step away from your work and think through the steps of the task.
  - a. true
  - b. false
  
8. We are more vulnerable to allowing our emotional state affect our safety choices after we have been away from work for an extended period of time.
  - a. true
  - b. false

*ANSWERS TO THE REVIEW QUESTIONS*

1. a

2. b

3. c

4. d

5. b

6. b

7. a

8. a