

Eliminate distractions to reduce workplace injuries

By SCF Arizona

Your members' employees face many distractions at their jobs every day, which require they stay focused on their tasks to help prevent safety accidents. Work interruptions are a leading cause of workplace injuries.

A recent survey found that nearly 60 percent of workplace disruptions involve attending to social media tools such as email, Facebook and text messaging.

With the growing use of personal cell phones, workers can send texts to friends and family throughout their shift. And with the introduction of smart phones, iPads and other electronic tablets, workers have access to their social media sites as well. Collectively, these devices can interfere with a workers' focus, said SCF Senior Loss Control Consultant Neil Van Tuyl.

The danger doesn't just exist when using the electronic devices while driving, they can become a distraction in all work environments, Van Tuyl said.

Most companies have adopted policies that prohibit the use of these electronics while performing certain critical job functions. Enforcement is the key to ensure the policies are efficient and the workers remain safe, Van Tuyl added.

"A disciplinary process is essential for effective enforcement of safety standards," he advised. "This typically includes a verbal warning for the first offense, written warning for the second and finally termination."

To keep workers safe from the social media distractions, safety advocates recommend that employers' policies:

- Block social media sites from the company's intranet
- Set companywide rules for personal cell phone or personal electronics use (such as times employees can use them) and ensure they are enforced
- Require that cell phones are set in silent mode and require that incoming calls go to voicemail, to be checked only during the employee's breaks or lunch
- Keep email and text messaging notifications turned off

Other common workplace distractions can include socializing, horseplay, employees who constantly chatter and uncomfortable environmental conditions such as temperature and noise.

To address these, safety experts recommend that employers:

- Alleviate uncomfortable environmental working conditions that could cause fatigue or irritability
- Keep instruction manuals on site to eliminate the need for employees to interrupt other workers
- Encourage workers to speak up about unsafe distractions
- Remind employees to be cautious when interrupting their colleagues

Distractions are abundant but can be eliminated primarily through communication, Van Tuyl said.

"Communicating company policies to all employees is the first step in ensuring that work hazards and

accident prevention measures are clearly understood," he said, adding that awareness and policy enforcement are crucial in preventing accidents and workers' compensation claims.

For more information, contact your SCF Association Coordinator or Regional Manager.

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