



Making Assumptions About Safeguards Safety Talk

Dictionary.com defines an assumption as “taking something for granted”. Making assumptions is almost never a good thing to do. This is especially true when dealing with workplace safety. There are a lot of moving parts in almost every work task let alone in an entire workplace at any given moment. If workers are making assumptions that safeguards are in place during their work not only are they at risk for injury but everyone in the work area could be.

Why Assumptions in the Workplace Are Dangerous

There are many reasons why workers may make assumptions about their work and the safeguards that mitigate the hazards that can harm them. Anything from time pressures to plain old laziness can lead a worker to making an assumption that a safeguard was put into place.

The problem is, when it is assumed a certain safe action is taken and it actually wasn't, someone can easily be injured. A couple quick examples:

- A laborer on a construction site assumes an equipment operator can see him as he approaches. The operator does not see the laborer enter the work area and backs right over him.
- An electrician assumes the maintenance worker he is working with has deenergized the machine they are repairing. The electrician goes to ask the maintenance worker if he did but sees that he is on the phone. The electrician decides to proceed with the task. Another worker comes over and starts up the equipment not knowing the electrician is working on it. The electrician is severely injured.
- A truck driver assumes nothing is behind him in a parking lot. Instead of checking to be sure he backs up and runs over a parked motorcycle.

How to Avoid the “Assumption Trap”

There are many things you can do to avoid falling into assuming safeguards are in place or other safe work practices are being followed. Some actions you can take:

- Verify safeguards are in place and functioning by confirming it with a coworker or taking the time to do it yourself.
- Double check your work or the work of others when it involves critical tasks.
- Use a detailed checklist when completing complex tasks.
- Use three-way communication to verify the messages of coworkers when working in a team.
- Take the time to stop work if there is any doubt that the right actions are not being taken, either from a production or safety standpoint.

Summary

Assumptions never lead to anything good. Especially when it comes to workplace safety. We are all human and we make mistakes. It takes focused effort to perform our work at a high level to get it done safely and efficiently. Do not be afraid to take time to verify safeguards are in place before you or a coworker begins a task or when conditions change.



Discussion points:

1. Has anyone experienced a negative consequence from making an assumption at work?
2. What is another example of how making an assumption here on our site could lead to an injury?