



Short Safety Subject

Short Safety Subjects are provided by the Public Safety Business Center, Fort Bragg, NC. Our intent is to provide safety topics for the purpose of increasing safety awareness and improving safety performance. Additional Short Safety Subjects are available on the PSBC Business Management Web Site at:

www.bragg.army.mil/psbc-bm/PubsAndForms/ShortSafetySubjects.htm

Your Brain Speaks! - Safety Is Not Common Sense

HEY! What are you doing? Hello! It's me - your Brain - or at least the part that still is working! If I told you once, I told you 10 times, that if you keep using the blade of that utility knife as a screwdriver, its going to slip and cut you. In fact, it slips off the screw head practically every time you use it. It's sheer luck that you haven't already cut off a finger, but sooner or later it's going to happen! What's worse is you know it! And I thought that you agreed to spend the extra minute or two to get the right Phillips screwdriver. How much time do you think you will lose if you get cut? - 10 minutes to try to stop the bleeding - 20 minutes to get someone to take you to the Emergency Room or clinic - Three hours getting medical attention - Go home for the rest of the day - Three more hours!

If you come back to work the next day, you'll have to do light duty - with a damaged hand you can't do your regular maintenance work. If you do - you'll be working impaired and risk even further injury. Doesn't that make enough sense to get the right tool now: which will take about 3 minutes.

What's worse about this is you know its unsafe - We've thought about it together numerous times and you've admitted to me its unsafe but you're too lazy to get up and get the right tool. You've thought that the Boss will yell at you for wasting time - but that's just rationalization - you know he won't do that.

You're afraid that your buddies will get on your case for being a wimp, right? And you're just plain lazy, as well!

So now is the time to make some changes. Get the Phillips, and start changing the hundreds of other little things that you know are unsafe. I know you will start feeling better about yourself and your work. What's more, I believe that your buddies will start to follow your example. I'll bet that they are going through the same thing that you and I are going through and if they see us - mind and body - working together, they'll follow suit. At the worst, the boss will grunt about the slightly slower work pace but when he sees the fewer injuries, reduced lost time, less damaged tools and equipment, lower insurance costs, and even that you and I and everyone else around here is listening to his boring safety talks (even I have a hard time trying to keep from going into REM sleep) he'll probably give you a pay raise from the additional profits - See! I can still dream!

Safety is Not Common Sense

This little dialogue (or monologue, if it is with yourself) emphasizes the fact that doing things safely is not common sense. However much this trite phrase is used, it will never be true that: “Safety is just Common Sense”.

Maybe, just maybe, safety is common sense to a safety professional who has been learning and teaching safe work behavior for years. But often even these people, including me, still use the proverbial “utility knife for a screwdriver” when we’re at home where no one else is watching - just our brain. (There is no escape from yourself!).

A Complex Process

Why? Because safe behavior is not just knowing the right (safe) way of doing something. It is learned, tested, and practiced until it is the automatic action like riding a bike or climbing stairs. This does not occur easily or rapidly unless our system is shocked with a strong negative action (the injury).

An Independent Mechanism

Common sense is the weighing of all efforts, consequences, and outcomes of an action, and then deciding the proper means of achieving the desired goal. Rarely, if ever, does this “common sense” mechanism, by itself, result in performing an action in the safest manner under the circumstances.

What makes it work?

Of course, when it does work, usually supported by qualified training, proper equipment and supplies, a conducive environment, peer support, constant reinforcement, and supportive leadership (this is critical), the odds will be in your favor and millions of work hours and decades of injury free time can be achieved, even expected by you, your group and the entire organization. Talk about a win-win situation!

Here’s How!

The company must start at the process, keep it going, provide the training, invest in safe equipment, give constant feedback on safe performance, and have dedicated, involved leadership.

Take The Initiative in Safety