

Workplace Safety – A Priority Now More Than Ever

Can You Imagine A Better Workplace?

A NEW ERA OF SAFETY

The pandemic has upended virtually every aspect of employment, ushering in remote work, putting massive strains on employee health and well-being, and permanently changing workplace safety standards. Safety is a wide umbrella – encompassing significant industrial safety and hazard risks to employees struggling with mental health and burn out. And Covid of course has exacerbated these issues.

A CULTURE OF SAFETY

Keeping the workplace safe should be everyone's prerogative and a core company value. It should not be only the responsibility of the safety department. Employees should feel comfortable discussing health and safety concerns as soon as they notice anything that is off. They should also feel encouraged to come forward if they are struggling with substance abuse or mental health issues.

BUILD A SAFETY SQUAD

When you get employees involved, they take ownership of safety (and often uncover issues that may be hard to assess if you aren't on the front lines). Asking employees to help identify problems and find solutions will foster a sense of collaboration, rather than making safety issues feel like "someone else's problem." Form a safety squad to be your ears and eyes and your ambassadors for safety.



REMOTE WORK SAFETY

Remote work options kept many businesses afloat during the pandemic. However, without knowing exactly where and under what conditions employees are working in, employers cannot properly assess workspace risks. This may lead to unintentional accidents and injuries while working remotely.

Employees are already reporting an increase in eyestrains, neck/back pain, and other musculoskeletal injuries due to their work-from-home environment. To help mitigate against these common injuries, employers are advised to communicate remote work safety best practices to their employees.

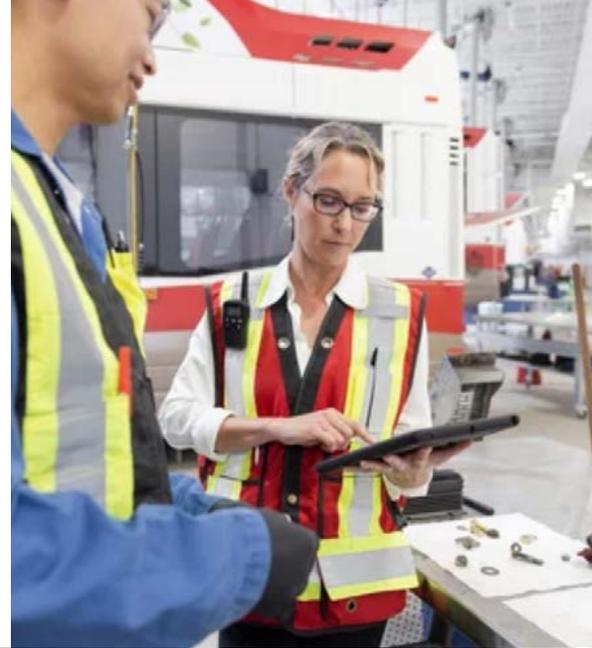
Developing a Remote Work Policy can help keep employees informed about best practices.

SAFETY FACTS

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), 13,000 U.S. workers are injured on the job every day. That's one injury every seven seconds. And a staggering \$1 billion is spent each week on workplace injuries across U.S. businesses. Significant risks arise from less-than-stellar safety reputations, including:

1. **Decreased productivity and morale**
2. **Difficulty retaining employees**
3. **Recruiting and hiring challenges**
4. **Debilitating legal expenses**
5. **Damage to employer brand**

Auditing your safety policies and practices on a regular basis will save you time and money in the long-run. It also sends a strong message to employees that you care about their well-being. This goes a long way.



SAFETY TIPS

(DON'T LOSE SIGHT OF SAFETY!)



Organizations today cannot afford to become complacent when it comes to safety. Any issues and complaints should be taken seriously. Even a slight mishap in the workplace can lead to reputational damage, fear and anxiety, and legal claims.

Employees today are keenly aware of their environment and will speak up if they feel unsafe. Employers should address issues proactively at the first sign of a safety concern (rather than waiting for things to escalate). Investigating issues should be centered on finding solutions and not on "blaming and shaming."

Even though every work environment is different and employee functions vary drastically, there are common workplace safety tips that all employers should follow:

- **Be aware of your legal responsibilities (i.e. OSHA).**
- **Train and educate employees on safety practices.**
- **Make sure all safety policies are simply written.**
- **Ensure that incidents and injuries are thoroughly reported, recorded and investigated.**
- **Keep up to date with the latest safety trends and best practices (talk to an expert).**
- **Communicate a sincere commitment to health and safety in the workplace (and walk the talk).**
- **Be aware of and continually scan for all potential hazardous situations in the workplace.**
- **Provide employees an opportunity to share concerns and suggestions regarding safety.**
- **Ensure that you are planned and prepared for all emergencies.**
- **Avoid punishing or retaliating against someone who comes forward with a safety issue.**
- **Form a "safety and health" committee to monitor the work environment and to brainstorm new solutions to safety issues.**

Safety might not be the sexiest agenda item, but its fundamental importance cannot be overstated.

Encouraging employee engagement, upward feedback & participation are key prerequisites in promoting and growing a positive safety culture in your workplace.

Employees must be able to trust that their leaders' number one priority is keeping employees safe, and that they can report to them if they notice any unsafe activity.

YOUR SAFETY STRATEGY IS ONLY AS GOOD AS YOUR COMMUNICATION

When conducting HR audits and assessments, the #1 reported issue is communication breakdowns. Most organizations today have spent hours upon hours developing safety policies and protocols. So why do we still see so many injuries and accidents? It may have to do with how we are communicating these health and safety policies.

Once a safety program is in place, it will be imperative to develop a structured communication plan. Frequent, timely and easy-to-understand "reminder memos" will keep critical safety information at the forefront of everyone's minds. If there are general safety policies tucked away in a handbook, it may be time to bring them to life through meaningful communication. No one likes to read a long laundry list of "rules" – make the communication simple and relevant.

Watch out for these communication barriers:

- If too much information is being communicated all at once, it can be hard for employees to absorb all those different messages at one time.
- If your message lacks clarity and is confusing or ambiguous, what an employee actually hears might be quite different from what you intended to convey.
- If you don't take employee concerns and priorities into account, they might not listen to what you have to say.

SPOTLIGHT ON Workplace Safety Expert, Sarah B. Gregg, P.E.

Sarah is the President and Owner of EHS Consulting Services, a company that provides regulatory assistance with environmental (EPA) and safety (OSHA) regulations. She has been in environmental, health & safety (EHS) consulting for over 17 years working for a variety of public and private industries as well as various government entities. Her specialty of providing EHS compliance support is built on her experience as an EHS compliance auditor. Having been both an external consultant and outsourced EHS Manager, Sarah uniquely understands how to balance corporate objectives with everyday facility-level needs.

Sarah received a Bachelor of Science in Civil & Environmental Engineering from the University of Rhode Island. She is a registered professional engineer in Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. She is also a Gestalt Professional Certified Coach (GPCC™), a training that focuses on building awareness within us and asking better questions through vested listening. This unique combination of skills allows Sarah to not only evaluate EHS regulatory compliance but also work with you and your organization to coach through implementing corrective actions and creating an engaged EHS culture.

Here is what Sarah had to say:

With companies returning staff to the office or adjusting to new business models, there are pain points of the post pandemic society being realized. One of the biggest struggles is to retain current employees while filling open positions. Most team members working in any industry have found themselves forced into wearing multiple hats and taking on responsibilities where their experience level might not be proficient (like taking on safety initiatives but not feeling 100% capable).

When wearing many hats, employees often gain experience through trial by fire. Safety is definitely not a category we want to learn by trial and error. It's an area that requires constant attention, up to date information based on the newest techniques, and knowledge of current regulatory standards.

Recent research on safety trends have shown increases in injury rates. Even with solid safety programs in place, injuries and accidents continue to rise. Covid has also compounded safety concerns. This trend does not mean "companies don't care," this trend means "companies need help."

Companies are run by humans. And like all other human traits, we sometimes forget to ask for help when task assignments exceed our personal resource constraints. People grow accustomed to their daily surroundings and sometimes lose sight of certain issues that may be causing safety risks. A different set of eyes can be beneficial to review safety programs and behaviors.

It's not enough to know what the hazards are, we must be able to recognize them. Once we recognize them, we must be able to fix them. An effective safety program is supported from the Top-Down and the Bottom-Up. It creates a better work environment. This allows companies to increase employee morale, reduce turnover, decrease workers' compensation premiums, and other financial benefits.



Feel free to contact Sarah at 330.689.9164 or sarah@helpchs.com for more details on how she can help you foster a positive safety work culture! More information below.

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Covid-19 and Vaccine Mandates – A Legal Overview



On September 9, 2021, the President held a press conference announcing executive orders that mandate Covid-19 vaccinations for employees of the executive branch of the federal government and employees of federal contractors and subcontractors. He also announced a forthcoming Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) issued by OSHA regarding vaccinations and/or routine testing for employers with more than 100 employees. It's estimated that 80 million workers will be impacted by the new rule.

So, what now? How can employers prepare and, yet again, navigate these uncharted waters? Here are recommended action steps that business owners and HR professionals can begin implementing right away:

- 1. Develop procedures for determining employees' vaccination status.**
Get ready to implement an organized and confidential process to determine vaccination status (asking whether employees are vaccinated against Covid-19 is legally permissible).
- 2. Determine if you will mandate the vaccine or allow unvaccinated employees to be tested weekly.**
Some employers may choose to make the Covid-19 vaccine mandatory (to maintain employment) because they may decide that weekly testing and tracking test results is too onerous.
- 3. Develop a plan for handling accommodation/exemption requests.**
Employers deciding to mandate the vaccine must have a crystal clear "exemption" policy for any employee who cannot be vaccinated because of a religious belief or disability reasons.
- 4. Have a plan for tracking test results.**
Employers who are testing employees weekly will need to determine if they are responsible for the cost of the test and whether employees must get paid for the time spent taking the test (per law).
- 5. Prepare for OSHA complaints and inspections.**
All prior OSHA/CDC compliances that have been in place must stay in place and will not be negated even if a company mandates the vaccine and/or engages in weekly testing (OSHA could ask for an employer's Covid-19 response plan and training records if it receives a complaint or inspects a workplace).

The ETS is already facing challenges – religious and medical exemptions, legal objections, and enforcement hurdles. Despite these challenges, it is recommended that employers still prepare for the implementation of these new regulations. If OSHA discovers a violation, it could issue a citation and penalty of approximately \$14,000. Right now, some are saying if the ETS goes into effect, it won't be enforceable until after Christmas (since companies will have 90 days from its release to comply). Once again, we will have to wait and see what happens here.

And it all comes back to leadership...

In the midst of this new wave of disruption and legislative action, leaders are once again challenged to make smart decisions, communicate effectively, and lead their teams with confidence and certainty. No matter the crisis, great leadership can help weather the storm and overcome adversity.

Leadership is not a title. It's an attitude and an aura. Leadership starts with a commitment (and courage) to be different – being optimistic when faced with hardships, open to creative ideas and solutions, and willing to listen to others' feedback. Leadership is half hustle and half heart.

And if you want a moment of leadership inspiration, please join us at our next Workplace Coffee Talk on September 29th from 9-10:30 as we discuss a timely topic – The Great Resignation: Why Leadership Matters. Register here: <https://leadership123.leadingthebest.com/LGIW0006>.

Workplace Coffee Talk – September 29, 2021



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Also, don't forget about the **Live2Lead Event** taking place on October 8th – this will be an outstanding opportunity to join virtually or in-person (in Independence) for this half day event. To register, go to:

<https://thetalentspecialists.com/live2lead>.



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Thank you for taking the time to read my newsletter. I will continue to share important information on relevant workplace topics and spotlight businesses and consultants here in Northeast Ohio making a difference. Feel free to reach out anytime at stella@imaginehrconsulting.com or 440.897.1991 for more information.

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