

Identifying Safety and Health Problems in the Workplace

Identifying health and safety problems can be as easy as answering basic questions. To determine if there are health and safety problems that need to be addressed in your workplace, use these questions:

- ↳ Do you or your co-workers have injuries or health complaints? If so, what types?
- ↳ Who has been hurt or is having symptoms?
- ↳ When do you or your co-workers feel these symptoms?
- ↳ Where in the workplace are safety or health problems occurring?
- ↳ What are the conditions that are causing problems?



The following “**Caution Health Hazards**” and “**Caution Safety Hazards**” tables provide more information.



CAUTION: Health Hazards

Common types of health hazards in the workplace are:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chemical (asbestos, solvents, chlorine) Biological (tuberculosis, HIV, hepatitis, molds) Physical (noise, heat and cold, radiation, vibration) Ergonomics or Repetitive Strain Injuries (carpal tunnel syndrome, back injuries) Psychological (stress)
How health hazards enter your body:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breathing (inhalation) Swallowing (ingestion) Skin (absorption) Cuts (injection)
Harm caused by health hazards depends on:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strength, or potency, of the agent. Amount of the agent that is present. How long you are exposed to the agent. Part of your body that is exposed.
Types of health effects:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acute: the effect shows up right away. Chronic: problems show up after a long period of exposure and/or long after the exposure ends. Local: only the part of the body that was exposed is affected. Systemic: an agent enters the body and affects other parts of the body.
Cancer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cancer is a term for many diseases in different parts of the body. Carcinogens are agents that cause cancer. There is no totally safe level of exposure to something that causes cancer. Cancer from a workplace exposure may develop 10, 20 or more years after exposure.
Sensitization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may become allergic or sensitive to some agents you work with. Sensitization can develop over time. For example, a health care worker may develop a serious allergic reaction to latex used in gloves.
Reproductive effects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both men and women can be affected by reproductive hazards at work. Reproductive hazards cause miscarriages and birth defects.

To “**CAUTION: Safety Hazards**” table

CAUTION: Safety Hazards**Common types of safety hazards in the workplace are:**

- Slips, trips and falls
- Being caught in or struck by moving machinery or other objects
- Fire and explosions
- Transportation and vehicle-related accidents
- Confined spaces
- Violence

Slips, Trips and Falls

- Bad housekeeping and poor drainage can make floors and other walking surfaces wet and slippery.
- Electrical wires along the floor pose a tripping hazard.
- You can fall if you are not provided with fall protection equipment, guardrails, and safe ladders.

Caught In or Struck By Moving Machinery/Objects

- Machinery can cause injuries in different ways:
- You can get parts of your body caught in or struck by exposed moving parts if machines are not properly guarded, or not locked out when being repaired.
- You can be struck by flying objects from machines without protective guards.

Fire and Explosions

- Improper labeling, handling or storage of certain materials can pose a risk of fire or explosion.
- Every workplace should have an evacuation plan for getting people out of a building in case of fire and an alarm or alert system to quickly inform employees of an emergency.
- Every worker should be trained on what to do in case of an emergency.

Transportation and Vehicle-Related Accidents

- Operators of vehicles and equipment can be injured or cause injury to pedestrians if equipment is unsafe or if adequate training has not been provided.
- You can be seriously injured or killed after being hit by a vehicle while repairing roads or doing other work in traffic zones. This danger exists when traffic is not properly routed and/or adequate barriers are not placed between the workers and the traffic.

Confined Spaces

- A confined space is an area with small openings for a worker to enter and exit and is not designed for regular work. Examples of confined spaces include manholes, sewer digestors and silos. There are many hazards in confined spaces.
- Workers can become unconscious and die from a lack of oxygen.
- There may be too much oxygen, or other chemicals that can catch fire or explode.
- Poisonous gases and vapors, such as hydrogen sulfide or carbon monoxide, may also build up in a confined space.
- Confined spaces can also pose physical hazards. They can be very hot or cold, very loud, or slippery and wet.
- Grain, sand or gravel can bury a worker.

Violence

- Violence on the job is a growing problem.
- Homicides are the second leading cause of workplace fatalities. Workplace violence includes physical assault as well as near misses, verbal abuse and sexual harassment.

