

Best Practices in Safety Orientation

New employees lack familiarity with your workplace, processes, chemicals, safety hazards, and safety practices—all of which puts them at greater risk than your seasoned veterans.

That's why your safety orientation program has to be efficient, hard-hitting, and packed with information.

Too often, orientation is considered a necessary evil. It's not given sufficient attention by some employers, who see the time employees spend in orientation as lost production rather than as an investment in safety and protection.

For their part, new workers are frequently bored and distracted during tedious "talking head" sessions. Even if they are pleased to have paid time off from regular duties, that still doesn't guarantee they're going to be paying attention.

But when orientation is done right, everybody gains. Safety orientation is an excellent way to get new hires on board, to shape their safety attitudes, and to bring them up to speed on your policies and programs.

It's also your first official opportunity to educate them about your organization, your expectations, and the importance of safety. This is the time when you set the tone, letting employees know you care about them, and that you have rules and procedures in place to keep them safe.

The most important aspect of orientation is the informational content. Remember that many new employees are young and lack the knowledge and experience necessary to jump in and work safely without a solid orientation.

Since you don't know what they don't know, and what they don't know can hurt them, make sure your safety orientation starts on day one and covers all the basics, including:

- * General site hazards
- * Specific hazards involved in each task the employee may perform
- * Safety policies and work rules, including accident-prevention strategies and injury-reporting procedures
- * Location of emergency equipment like fire extinguishers, eyewash stations, and first-aid supplies
- * Smoking regulations and designated smoking areas if you have them
- * Steps to take following an accident or injury
- * Proper reporting of emergencies, accidents, and near-misses
- * Selection, use, and care of personal protective equipment
- * Emergency evacuation procedures, routes, and security systems
- * Safe housekeeping rules
- * Safe use of tools and equipment
- * Safe lifting techniques and material-handling procedures
- * Hazardous materials in use and location of material safety data sheets

There are those employers who also like to include information about the costs associated with various types of accidents. Some companies even choose to bring in an employee who has been injured to explain what happened and the effect of the injury on the employee and his or her family.

Sound a bit too negative for an upbeat orientation session? Those who have tried it say a first-hand account of an accident and its aftermath can capture new workers' attention like little else.

No matter what's going on in your workplace or in the marketplace, think twice before skimping on new-hire orientation programs. In fact, investing in your employees' well being makes a great deal of sense for safety-minded businesses that care about their workers, their profitability, and their workers' ability to deliver. **Make safety orientation meaningful. Make it memorable and keep it short.**

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