



Error Trap – Summer Vacations and Holidays

When we talk about distractions in the workplace, we typically think about being interrupted by a coworker, a customer asking questions or a phone call from home. What about summer vacations and holidays? Can they be a distraction? You bet they can!

Perhaps while you should be focused on a work task, your mind drifts off to thoughts of being on a beach with a cold drink in hand. While your mind is on vacation and your body continues executing the work task, you put yourself and your coworkers at great risk. Numerous studies show that humans make three to five errors per hour. This includes mistakes you are not aware you made, such as when you were thinking about being at the beach.

Summer vacations and holidays can not only affect those of us daydreaming about upcoming time away, but they also can impact our crews that are left shorthanded as well as coworkers returning from time away. All these scenarios are error traps that can result in an undesirable outcome.

Fortunately, we can help manage these error traps by reaching into our Human Performance (HuP) toolbox and pulling out a few familiar tools.

Pre-Job Briefing

The pre-job briefing or tailboard is a HuP tool that allows us to think through a job and use that knowledge to make the job as safe and efficient as possible.

This is the time for the crew to identify error traps such as distractions, time pressure, being shorthanded and the physical environment (electrical hazards, overhead hazards, weather, mud, vehicles, etc.).

Next, we need to eliminate as many error traps as possible. The more error traps we eliminate, the easier they become to manage. The error traps that cannot be eliminated must not be forgotten; they must be controlled.

Two-Minute Drill

After completing your pre-job briefing, it's time to tear into it, right? Not quite yet. What happens if a hazard was overlooked or not seen during the pre-job briefing? What if your coworker Jane who is leaving for vacation at the end of the shift forgot to put out the advanced warning signs for the work zone?

By taking the time to conduct a two-minute drill, we allow time to identify conditions that were not known or seen during the pre-job briefing.

Complete the drill by:

1. Looking around the work area and determining if conditions are consistent with those described in the pre-job briefing.
2. Ask yourself: How could I get hurt? Do I have the proper PPE? What hazards are in the area? Are the appropriate safety barriers in place? What else could go wrong?
3. Talk with coworkers or your supervisor about unexpected hazards or conditions.
4. Eliminate or control any additional hazards.

Situational Awareness

After you and your coworkers complete the two-minute drill and update your pre-job briefing, it's time to go to work. While working, you should be actively scanning 360° for hazards and anomalies and visualizing likely outcomes, also known as having situational awareness.

Situational awareness is a hazard recognition tool that allows you to be aware of what is happening around you in terms of where you are, where you are supposed to be and whether anyone or anything around you is a threat to your health and safety. More simply, it's knowing what is going on around you.

Over 80% of workplace injuries arise from worker behavior. We make mistakes, errors in judgment or simply do not have our full attention on the job and something happens.

By being situationally aware, you notice your coworker Bob close to an active traffic lane while he is on the phone complaining about his bill from the resort he vacationed at last week.

Questioning Attitude

A questioning attitude helps us maintain an accurate understanding of work conditions at any given time.

It alerts people to potential hazards, warning signs, critical steps, error-likely situations and other uncertainties in the work environment or the work plan.

It encourages people to stop when unsure and resolve hazards, warnings, error-likely situations or uncertainties before proceeding.

A healthy questioning attitude is what leads you to stop what you are doing, ask "What if ...?" and then call for Bob to move away from traffic.

Summary

Vacations and holidays can be fun; they can be exhausting; they can be stressful. Vacations and holidays can be different things to different people, but ultimately, they are an error trap in the workplace.

By starting each day off with a thorough pre-job briefing and conducting two-minute drills while maintaining situational awareness and a questioning attitude, you can do your part in helping ensure everyone gets the opportunity to spend time away from work with friends and loved ones.

And remember, whether you're gone for a week or simply for the weekend, your safety skills, work habits and even your attitude may need to be recharged.