



Do you know where the hazards are in your shop?

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Has an employee in your shop ever been pinned by a car? If so, did you chalk it up to bad luck – or did you think about why it happened? Were the brakes faulty? Did the employee put the car in drive rather than reverse? Was the technician unfamiliar with the car?

Have you stopped an employee from working under a car held up only by jacks? The reason to not rely solely on jacks is probably clear to you – jacks can fail. So why didn't the employee use jack stands?

Do employees routinely use compressed air to clean dust off their clothes? Stop and think about that. Is there any hazard? Is it a good idea to blow over a hundred pounds of dirty, dust-laden air at each square inch of one's face or skin?

You provide safety glasses to your employees. Do they wear them? Or have you seen the eye protection worn on top of heads more often than over the eyes?

Some of those hazards seem very obvious, especially in retrospect. But are they obvious at the time? You notice dents in a car without even stopping to think about those. Do you ever notice safety hazards? Have you taken the time to look at the jobs that employees do, thinking about how injuries can be prevented?

A key part of a good safety program is identifying and assessing hazards. A lot of that hazard identification work has been done for you, often by those who came before. We know vehicle hoists need routine inspections, because people have been killed when they failed. We know tailpipe exhaust systems have to be used, because people have suffered from carbon monoxide poisoning. Bad experiences are one way to identify hazards, but not the only way. There are better ways, ways that don't rely on someone being injured before a hazard is identified and assessed:

1. Ask your employees. This could be done formally, through employee surveys, or informally, in a shop meeting, over lunch or when assigning work. Do they have concerns? Are there jobs they don't like doing, because they feel those jobs are hazardous? Is there equipment that needs to be fixed? Are they having problems with any equipment? Are there work practices that they think are unsafe? Do they have suggestions for safer ways to work? Often, just asking and listening to what employees say will make a difference.
2. Do self-inspections on a routine basis. Monthly inspections are required for fire extinguishers to check that they're accessible, hung up, and fully charged. Eyewashes need weekly inspections, to make sure the water runs clear or, if gravity-fed, that the solution is current. But don't limit your monthly inspection to the mandatory items, because these are a good opportunity to systematically look for potential hazards. Do garage doors reverse if

something is under them? Are electrical cords in good condition, with no damage to their insulation and with grounding prongs present? Are the paths to exits kept clear; do they lead safely away from the building? Check your vehicle hoists, to make sure they function smoothly and the safety latches work. Are gases stored safely? Look at housekeeping, at equipment.... This is your chance to find hazards before something bad happens.

3. A preventive maintenance program doesn't identify hazards, but it does prevent them. Get your vehicle hoists inspected and serviced annually by experts. Have your heating system checked.
4. Observe. Watch how your employees work. Common sense is acquired through experience, assuming you survive your experiences. Not everyone has experienced what you've lived through and learned, so not everyone has the common sense that you take for granted. As you watch employees working, look for what could be hazardous. ***Walk through the shop thinking, "What could go wrong?"*** Is someone on a ladder? Could he fall? Is the area around the ladder clear? Is the ladder set up correctly?

Look at your tasks. Employees move cars in your crowded shop: ask yourself how someone could be struck by a car. Employees use hazardous chemicals – brake cleaner, acid cleaners, paints: how could they be overexposed? Could chemicals get on their skin? In their eyes? Employees use grinders. What could go wrong with that? Could a grinding wheel explode?

And then ask yourself and ask your employees how to prevent those problems. Put in place procedures to make sure employees aren't struck by cars.

Choose safer products, provide ventilation and, if that isn't enough, require personal protective equipment to limit exposure to chemicals. Use guards on grinders and train employees on safe use.



Serious injuries are not planned, but they don't occur out of the blue – you probably had lots of warnings, even if you didn't hear them. Those warnings could have been in the form of close calls or minor incidents, incidents where no damage occurred and no one was hurt. Pay attention to those. Pay attention to any hazardous situation in your shop. Don't walk past it. Whether it involves an employee or a co-worker, stop and say something. You don't want your company or your co-worker to be the next statistic.

This article is intended to provide general information (no advice) about current safety topics. To discuss your specific concerns and how CHESS may help, please contact CHESS at 651-481-9787 or chess@chess-safety.com

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