



What Can You Do About Your Own Safety?

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Yes, employers are responsible to provide employees with a safe workplace. There are many laws, rules, and regulations pointing out the safe way to perform most jobs. Training on how to safely perform most jobs is a requirement. There are tasks which require Personnel Protective Equipment (PPE) to reduce job risks. Exposure limits (to all kinds of things) trigger different protections or the suspension of the task at hand until it is safe. How we communicate about safety in our workplaces has requirements. All of these are requirements of employers, but we may be asked to help.

In most of the places we work, the company is concerned with safety. They may not have people in charge who are knowledgeable about our jobs to know if what is going on is safe. Employer training is designed to give us the knowledge to recognize working conditions that may be unsafe. We are the ones who often find the unsafe conditions and can alert someone about the problem. It is part of our job to communicate unsafe working conditions. We approach management and figure out the best way to take care of the problem.

Now the above sounds great. Good, benevolent employers work with their employees to ensure no one is hurt on the job. But, if all we had were good, benevolent employers we wouldn't need OSHA or unions. We know that not every employer goes out of their way to make sure workers are safe. We are not regularly sent to training sessions on how to perform our jobs. We are sometimes pressured to increase risks to get a job done because of

time or money. We have heard things like, "We use to do it this way," to get us to ignore some risk. People have been replaced because they complained about safety.

You need to be able to stand up for your own safety. You should feel free to approach your boss to solve safety problems. But, this is not always the case. If you feel that your employer would discipline or fire you for bringing up a safety issue, there are other ways to protect yourself without exposing your job. First, the law says you cannot be fired for reporting a safety hazard. The law can't protect us all the time. OSHA realizes that employers can get around this so there is supposed to be a way for you to anonymously make a report to your employer. Put a note in the suggestion box or call the safety hotline number are ways to make the report. Next, you are a member of a union. You can report a problem to your Shop Steward or Business Agent. As safety has become a bigger issue your employer may have a safety committee. Make a report to your union representative on the committee. Some locals have safety representatives or safety committees. They should have a way to contact them with a problem. You also can make a report to OSHA itself. OSHA usually does not move fast, and they may not show up at your workplace. But, complaints to OSHA are forwarded to employers and are taken very seriously.

It is hard to take a stand with an employer. As work has slowed down this gets harder. Many people don't want to rock the boat for fear that they will not have a job. But, if there is a dangerous condition in your workplace, and you and your co-workers are injured or made sick because of this condition you won't have a job either. Together we can stand and create better, safer conditions in the places we work. We have to do it.

