
Complacency and the workplace

In today's fast-paced work environment, many employees find themselves settling into routines that can often lead to complacency. Complacency can be defined as, doing the same task for so long without incident that you assume nothing will ever happen. While familiarity with tasks can create a sense of comfort, it can also pose significant risks, especially concerning workplace safety. It's crucial to understand how complacency can lead to accidents and what can be done to mitigate these risks. Complacency can affect anyone at any age, regardless of their experience, so it is important to train all employees on how to spot complacency among themselves and other employees.

Let's take an example of a person who performs a daily safety inspection before production starts. The purpose of the inspection is to identify any potential safety hazards. This daily routine occurs for months even years without incident. But, because "an incident has never occurred", the employee decides to skip an inspection one day and no injuries resulted. So, the employee skips another one, then another, and soon inspections are rarely being conducted. Until something happens. Skipping important safety steps due to complacency could result in serious injury to the employee or fellow workers.

Usually, the best person to spot complacency is the employee themselves, but complacency can mean they don't see the dangers right in front of them. To overcome this, teach employees to spot signs of complacency in their co-workers first. The more they learn how to recognize these signs in others, the easier it will be to recognize it in themselves.

Keep an eye out for the following situations that may indicate complacency is setting in:

- Dissatisfaction with work and/or lack of motivation
- Taking short cuts in work processes, safety procedures or inspections
- Increased frequency of near-misses or incidents
- Changes in attitude
- Noticeable increase or decrease in communication
- Tardiness for meetings or shifts

Increased employee engagement is a great way to help workers get out of the rut of complacency. Actions workers can take include:

- Consciously focusing on the task at hand.
- Identifying distractions when they come up and dismissing them.
- When conducting repetitive tasks, be on the lookout for procedural improvements that can help break up the monotony.
- Understanding the greater purpose of their job, such as the finished product or report, and interacting with team members regularly.

Identifying and addressing complacency is a team effort. Not only is it key for employees, but the employer can assist by implementing best practices such as:

- Share the Mission— Remind employees of the company’s purpose and goals so they maintain a connection to the larger missions and emphasize that their behaviors have an impact.
- Minimize Routines—Since repetition is related to complacency, consider job rotation or change up some of the work tasks to add variety to an employee’s job. Providing differing work tasks can help maintain focus and keep employees from falling into “cruise control” mode.
- Encourage observation of others - Have employees briefly stop work and observe the actions of others as they work. Observing others raises one’s own awareness, as well as the awareness of their co-workers.
- Correct poor performance - Mentoring programs and coaching can help employees identify and correct poor work practices and potential problems before an injury occurs.
- Conduct safety discussions and tool box talks – Make safety talks part of a daily routine and get employees involved and engaged with team members.
- Share Knowledge – Have employees identify and share the steps they perform to complete a job. Having another set of eyes or someone else’s ideas may help improve the process.

Complacency can be a dangerous thing, and everyone is susceptible. It can lead to underperformance, low job satisfaction, workplace accidents and low morale. But with a team effort and employee engagement, complacency doesn’t have to run the workplace.

If you would like to know more about Sedgwick’s safety services or would like to schedule a confidential consultation, please contact Andy Sawan at andrew.sawan@sedgwick.com or 330.819.4728.