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## Counteract Safety Backsliding to Stay Healthy

***June is National Safety Month, an annual reminder to protect yourself and others from harm by always being safety-conscious.***

Injuries and fatalities are often caused by failure to comply with common sense precautions such as wearing a seatbelt; staying hydrated, eating right and getting enough sleep; securely storing firearms,

medications and household chemicals; or using personal protective equipment designed for the job.

People's perceptions of risk vary. What seems dangerous to one person may be a case of "I've always done it this way and nothing bad has ever happened to me" to another. Even people who are risk-averse occasionally do risky, unsafe things for all sorts of reasons. To name a few:

- Taking shortcuts because of peer pressure, deadlines or personal pride.
- Losing focus due to distractions or feeling hungry, sick, hungover or tired.
- Not receiving training or not finding relevance in the training provided.
- Thinking there is a "better way" and changing an established process.
- Underestimating risk or overestimating physical and mental capabilities.
- Complacency fueled by a culture without true commitment to "safety first."
- Feeling invincible and living by the creed, "Do as I say, not as I do."

### Getting the Message Across

Adults and children alike must be taught about safe practices at work, at home and at play. Lessons should be tailored to the audience, and once they are put into action, repeated over time because people gradually slip back into risky behaviors.

Occupational health and safety professionals say stories that convey the importance of caring for each other are one of the most effective teaching methods. For example, telling others about how a friend or relative got hurt and how the incident could have been prevented is likely to be remembered and shared because it has emotional impact. It's far less likely that a list of safety tips will be passed along.

It's also important to learn how to deliver safety messages in a non-punitive, non-judgmental way. For instance, an experienced professional may notice a

young colleague working unsafely but not know how to approach her without sounding like a know-it-all. Consequently, nothing gets said and the risky behavior continues.

In a publication on [Better Safety Conversations](#), the Occupational Health and Safety Administration provides recommendations including:

1. Using active listening techniques to help you understand the other person's perspective and provide a foundation for empathetic communication. Example: "I hear you are concerned that this activity could be hazardous to your health. Tell me more about your concerns and what you think can be done to prevent exposure."
2. Focusing on positive aspects of health and safety practices. Example: "This change in process will reduce your injury risk while streamlining production."
3. Demonstrating that personal health and safety is a top priority. Example: "When I see injury reports, my heart goes out to the workers and their families, and I want to do what I can to see it doesn't happen to somebody else."

## Safety Month Themes

The [National Safety Council](#) (NSC) is emphasizing the following four

topics for National Safety Month, one for each week:

**Hazard recognition:** It's up to all of us to notice health and safety hazards and take steps to eliminate them. This may involve reporting major exposure hazards to authorities, or simply replacing a burned out light bulb or filling an empty water container on a hot, humid day.

**Slips, trips and falls:** Many injuries are caused by a slip, trip or fall that could have been prevented with awareness. Common culprits include uneven, slippery or wet surfaces, power cords, open file cabinet drawers, poorly lit stairs, clutter and inappropriate footwear. Walking while texting is also a significant risk factor.

**Fatigue:** Many people get less than the daily seven to nine hours of sleep their body needs. Fatigue is associated with poor concentration, errors, accidents and the development of some chronic diseases. To prevent symptoms such as low energy, irritability, depressed mood and loss of appetite, it's advisable to avoid alcohol and caffeine, reduce digital screen time before bedtime, and sleep in a cool, dark room.

**Impairment:** In this case the NSC is referring to both physical and emotional conditions that may impair a person's ability to behave in a safe manner. Impairment may be caused by lack of sleep,

prescription and illicit substances (e.g., marijuana, alcohol, opioids and other drugs) or stressful situations that cause anxiety and make it difficult to function.

It may be human nature to backslide on safety practices, but you can reverse this tendency with positive reinforcement.

## Safety Pledge

*The National Safety Council has a workplace safety pledge that you can sign, dedicate to someone else and, if you want, share publicly at [nsc.org/workpledge](https://www.nsc.org/workpledge).*

*I pledge to:*

*Never compromise my own safety or the safety of my co-workers to get the job done.*

*Actively look for hazards, promptly report them and take appropriate action to warn others.*

*Be a good safety role model for my friends and family even when off the job.*

