

Weekly Safety Briefings

Week 21 – Monday, May 18 – Friday, May 22

Fatigue and Focus

Introduction - Fatigue and Focus

Introduction for leaders (Use prior to Monday's Toolbox Talk)

Purpose for supervisors:

This week, we will discuss the concepts of fatigue, the loss of focus, and how both affect workplace safety. The goal this week is to have employees recognize the importance of fatigue and the loss of focus in themselves and their fellow employees. We will also explore later in the month how distractions at work can cause injuries, how to identify and manage cognitive load, and how to maintain proper situational awareness.

Key message to set the tone:

These weekly safety briefings focus on employee care and help them protect themselves from fatigue-related lapses in focus and distractions. 13% of workplace injuries are related to fatigue, and distractions cause many more. If we can explain the importance of these topics and have team members involved in finding risks and fixing risks, we can reduce workplace injuries and protect our team members.

How leaders should frame this month's Toolbox Talks:

- These talks are about **teaching** team members the importance of caring for themselves and one another by recognizing symptoms of fatigue and distraction.
- Create a **conversational style** that keeps employees **focused and engaged**. If employees are invested, they will want to share their enthusiasm for safety with their peers and help create the workplace they want. Encourage team members to raise questions or concerns, find solutions, and add to the information being shared with them.
- Speaking up, slowing down, raising concerns, reporting safety opportunities, and fixing issues are signs of professionalism. Encouraging your team members to do the same is another sign of professionalism and respect.

Team member engagement:

For these sections, try to do a quick check-in with everyone. Ask team members basic questions to show that their supervisor cares about them personally and their problems; this time can also help identify possible safety concerns. Try to ask as many questions as time allows to help them understand that management is there to support their problems and help protect them. These are sample questions to give you an idea of what to ask; feel free to use questions that will benefit your workplace the most.

What to say to the team:

"Throughout this week, we are going to talk about fatigue and loss of focus and how it can affect you or a fellow team member and lead to a possible life-changing accident. Please feel encouraged to join in on this discussion with questions or personal experiences in the next few weeks."

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Monday- Fatigue: Why it is Important

Key message: Fatigue is hard to notice in yourself and others, but we need to understand it so we can help protect each other and ourselves from lifelong injuries.

Discussion:

No matter how experienced someone is at a job, fatigue can get in the way and cause minor mistakes that turn into major accidents for you or a team member. Fatigue does not always mean falling asleep; it is slower reaction times, poor decision-making, forgetfulness, and lack of attention. Fatigue can lead to major accidents, coming from taking “shortcuts” like not performing Lockout/Tagout or not wearing proper PPE.

A real-world example:

John had been working a long shift and was fatigued. When the powered conveyor system jammed, he knew he could step in while everyone went to lunch and fix it to get production back up. Standard procedure required the system to be fully shut down and locked out before clearing jams but this would take a long time to complete. Instead of following Lockout/Tagout, the fatigued John decided to take a shortcut and skip this step of the process. While working on clearing the jam, his team members came back from lunch and turned the conveyor back on. John's hand became caught between moving rollers and a metal product, resulting in a severe crushing and laceration injury that required medical treatment and modified duty. After this injury, corrective actions were put in place, such as installing a gate around the section of the conveyor that jams, which can only be opened once lockout/tagout has been completed.

Team member engagement:

- “If you notice a coworker looking tired or distracted, what should you do?”

Challenge for the day:

Here's a challenge for today that I would like you to try out:

- Focus Challenge:
“Take a 3-second pause if you are feeling fatigued before a new task today and reset your focus and make sure you are not taking shortcuts.”

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Tuesday – Noticing Fatigue in Yourself and Others

Key message: Fatigue is not always obvious; recognizing it early in yourself and others can prevent serious accidents. As a team, we need to be looking out for each other and speak up when we notice something.

Discussion:

Fatigue affects us in smaller things like slower reaction times, missed steps, poor communication, irritability, or someone who is not acting like themselves. Fatigue builds up over time, especially during a long, busy shift or a repetitive task. The danger comes from you or a team member not realizing this, which is why it is so important to look out for each other and warn each other if you notice a change. It is important to remember that fatigue not only affects you but also every team member around you. Seeing one shortcut and not speaking up can change the lives of everyone around you. Speaking up and asking a team member how they are feeling or mentioning that you notice they don't seem like themselves, is an act of caring and respect for one another. Please make sure you say thank you when a team member approaches you and shares their concern. Ensuring your team members are as safe as possible is an act of respect.

A real-world example

Dave had been running a CNC punch press for most of the day. It was a long shift, production was steady, and he was tired. Normally, after each part came off the machine, he was supposed to place it on a pallet and check it for sharp edges or burrs before moving on to the next cycle. As the shift dragged on, Dave began to feel worn down. He was frustrated, moving slower, and just wanted to get through the last parts. Instead of stopping to check and clean up each part, he skipped the inspection step, thinking it wouldn't be a big deal, "just this once." A coworker, Javier, noticed Dave didn't seem like himself. He saw Dave rushing and skipping the usual deburring step but chose not to say anything. Dave looked irritated, and Javier didn't want to bother him or start a conversation at the end of a long shift. A short time later, Dave grabbed a finished part and cut his hand on a sharp edge, causing a deep enough laceration that he needed medical treatment.

Team member engagement:

- "Based on the real-world example if Javier spoke up would the accident still have happened and how should Javier approach Dave?"

Challenge for the day:

Here's a challenge for today. Try this and report back with your findings:

- A focus Challenge:
"Today, pay attention not only to your own energy levels, but also to signs of fatigue in a coworker, and if you notice it, speak up or check in."

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Wednesday – How to Manage Fatigue

Key message: Fatigue can be managed with the right habits, awareness, and communication before it turns into an incident.

Discussion:

We can't completely avoid fatigue, but we can manage it. Long shifts, repetitive tasks, early mornings, and outside stress can all contribute to feeling tired at work. The key is recognizing it early and acting before it affects your safety. Attempting to manage fatigue outside of work is a good start: getting enough rest, staying hydrated, taking proper breaks, and avoiding anything the day or night before that will affect you in the next day. Some things that can help when you are at work, or engaged in a tedious task, might be getting a cup of coffee, grabbing a snack, and taking your scheduled breaks. But we all know this is very hard. Often, we will hear people say “avoid rushing, multitasking, or working on autopilot”, but honestly, I don't think any of these have ever worked for me. I think rushing and autopilot are natural human responses. So, if we know we are going to rush, or go into autopilot even when we try not to, and these states of being lead to mistakes, what can we do to protect ourselves? One thing we can do is identify and improve areas in our work where mistakes are easy to make. If we can identify areas where mistakes are easy, we can think about ways to make the area safer. Better controls can create a safer work environment so that when someone makes a mistake – and we know they will – the result is not catastrophic, it won't end in injury.

A real-world Example:

During a long shift, Randy had been operating a hydraulic press used for forming stamped metal parts. The standard procedure required each part to be removed with tongs and placed in a bin to the side. Randy, becoming fatigued, had begun to use his hands to remove the parts because the tongs were getting frustrating to use. Greg noticed this and approached him, asking why he was not following the procedure. Randy explained that he was fatigued from the long shift and was taking shortcuts. Greg explained to use the tongs and, during his scheduled break, get some coffee and food to lower his fatigue. Randy followed Greg's advice and then completed his shift without incident. Later, Randy mentioned the situation to his supervisor. After reviewing it, management made an improvement by adjusting the sensor timing and adding a guided chute so parts cleared consistently, removing the temptation for anyone to reach into the machine at all.

Team member engagement:

- “When during the shift do you feel the most rushed or worn down and is there anywhere that this is?”

Challenge for the day:

Here is a challenge for today, report back tomorrow with any ideas you came up with:

- Identify one improvement: look for **one small change** that would:
 - Make the job easier when tired, or
 - Reduce reliance on memory, speed, or perfect timing.

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Thursday – What is Focus and Why is it Important

Key message:

Staying focused is a critical part of workplace safety. Distractions and losing focus increase the risk of injury. That's why strong controls matter, they help the system deal with mistakes and protect us when focus slips, rather than relying on people to always perform perfectly.

Discussion:

No matter how skilled you are or how many times you have done a process, focus is important. Being deliberate in your thinking and actions will help avoid shortcuts and distractions. Focus is not only about paying attention; it also means being fully engaged with what you are doing. When you lose focus, you are more likely to make a mistake that can lead to an accident.

A real-world Example:

Carlos was assigned to complete a routine machine setup on a packaging line. He had done this task many times and was confident he could complete it quickly. While working, he was also thinking about an upcoming production deadline and responding to questions from a nearby team member. Because of these distractions, Carlos skipped a step in the setup checklist and failed to verify that a safety guard was properly secured. When the machine was restarted, a loose component shifted unexpectedly. His hand came too close to the moving part, and he suffered a significant hand injury that required stitches and restricted duty. After this was explained to management, an interlocked machine guard was installed that prevents the equipment from operating unless all guards are fully secured.

Team member engagement:

- “Where do current controls help catch errors when focus isn’t perfect and if they are not how do we improve it?”

Challenge for the day:

Here's a challenge for the day, let's discuss the outcome tomorrow:

- Improvement challenge:
Identify one task where a brief loss of focus could easily lead to a mistake and if there is a way to improve this task to make it safer.

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Friday – Week Wrap-Up

Key message:

Staying focused requires active effort, good habits, and awareness to help prevent injuries and mistakes.

Discussion:

This week, we talked a lot about focus and why it's such an important part of working safely. We also recognized that focus isn't something we can keep at 100% all the time—fatigue, pressure, and normal day-to-day work all affect it. That's why we don't want safety to depend on focus alone. Capacity and controls are there to support us when focus slips and to keep small mistakes from becoming bigger problems.

This week we tried a few challenges to help us notice where focus matters most, where work gets harder when we're tired, and where the system could do more to support us. I'd like to take a few minutes to hear how those challenges went and what you noticed or learned from them.

Here are some **natural, low-pressure ways** a supervisor can keep the conversation going if the team doesn't have much to share yet:

- *“That’s okay—sometimes it’s harder to notice things right away. Let’s think back through the shift. Was there any point where you felt a little more rushed or mentally drained than usual?”*
- *“Even if nothing stood out, did anyone notice parts of the job that required extra checking or concentration?”*
- *“Sometimes what we **didn’t** notice is useful too. Did anything surprise you by being easier than expected?”*
- *“If we ran these challenges again tomorrow, what would you pay more attention to?”*
- *“It’s possible the work supported you well yesterday. Where do you feel the system helped you stay on track without having to think too hard?”*
- *“No right or wrong answers here—we’re just trying to understand how the work feels on a normal day.”*

End of the Week Wrap-Up:

As we wrap up the week, we've spent time talking about focus—why it matters and how it naturally changes during the day. We also learned that safety isn't about expecting perfect focus all the time. Capacity and controls are there to support us when focus drops and to keep normal human slips from turning into harm. The goal of these discussions wasn't to find faults, but to better understand how the work really happens and where the system helps—or could help more. Let's carry these learnings forward and keep looking for ways to make the work easier and safer for everyone.