Workplace Learning System

Weekly Safety Briefings

Week 39 – Monday, September 21 – Friday, September 25, 2026

Blind Spots

Introduction– Blind Spots: The Hazards You Cannot See and the Ones You Have Stopped Looking For

Introduction for Leaders:

This week we are talking about blind spots. Not just the physical kind, the areas around equipment and vehicles where visibility is limited, but the broader category of things people cannot see, do not see, or have stopped seeing even when they are right in front of them. Both types are serious. Both show up in incident investigations. And both are manageable once you understand how they work and what to do about them.

Blind spots are not a sign that someone is careless. They are a normal feature of how people and equipment operate. The problem is when no one accounts for them. A forklift operator who does not know their blind spots is dangerous. A team member who has stopped noticing a hazard they see every day is equally at risk. This week we are going to name both types, understand why they exist, and build the habits that close the gap.

How to Frame This Week:

- Bring it to the floor. Walk through the specific equipment in your area and name where the blind spots are. Generic conversations do not land the same way as ones tied to the forklift your team uses every morning.
- Monday carries the weekly challenge. Check in mid-week and use Friday for the report-back.
- Encourage honesty. Most team members have operated in a blind spot at some point without realizing it. Creating space for people to say so without judgment is what makes the conversation useful.

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Monday – Two Kinds of Blind Spots

Discussion:

When most people hear blind spot, they think of vehicles: the area behind and beside a car or truck where the driver cannot see. That is a real and serious hazard, and we will cover it in detail this week. But there is a second kind of blind spot that causes just as many incidents and almost never gets named directly. It is the hazard a person stops seeing because they have looked at it so many times without anything happening that their brain no longer registers it as a threat.

Both types share the same core problem: a person acts as though something is not there, either because they genuinely cannot see it or because their brain has decided it does not matter. In both cases, the hazard is real. In both cases, the outcome when contact finally happens is the same regardless of why the person did not see it coming.

Physical blind spots: what creates them:

Equipment design. Every piece of mobile equipment has areas the operator cannot see from their position. Forklifts have dead zones directly in front when carrying a load, behind the cab, and in the rear swing arc during turns. Large trucks have blind spots on both sides and directly behind. These are built into the design of the equipment and do not change based on how careful the operator is.

Load and mast obstruction. A forklift carrying a tall or wide load significantly expands the blind zone in front of the machine. The operator may have clear visibility when traveling empty and almost none when loaded.

Environmental obstruction. Racking, machinery, corners, columns, and staging areas create dead zones in a facility that neither pedestrians nor vehicle operators can see around until they are already in each other's path.

Perceptual blind spots: what creates them:

Familiarity. A hazard seen every day without consequence gradually stops being processed as a hazard. The brain learns to filter it out the same way it filters out background noise. This is the same mechanism behind complacency, applied specifically to what a person pays attention to in their environment.

Task focus. When someone is concentrating on a specific task, their awareness of everything outside that task narrows significantly. A team member focused on placing a part correctly may not notice the forklift moving into their peripheral vision.

Weekly Challenge:

This week, each person identifies one physical blind spot and one perceptual blind spot in their work area. The physical one is a location where you or someone operating equipment cannot see clearly. The perceptual one is something you have stopped actively noticing even though it is still a hazard. Bring both to Friday.

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Tuesday – Physical Blind Spots and How to Work Around Them

Discussion:

Physical blind spots cannot be eliminated by trying harder or paying more attention. If the operator cannot see the area from the cab, they cannot see it. What can change is how the operator and everyone working around the equipment manage those known dead zones so that an unseen person and a moving piece of equipment never end up in the same place at the same time.

How operators can manage physical blind spots:

- Know your equipment's specific blind zones before you operate it. If you have never been told exactly where they are, ask. Walk around the equipment with someone who knows it and have them show you what you cannot see from the seat.
- Slow down before entering any intersection, corner, or area where your view is obstructed. Speed and a blind spot together remove whatever small margin might otherwise exist.
- Use a spotter when backing into congested areas or when carrying a load that significantly limits your forward view. A spotter is not optional when visibility is compromised. It is the control that compensates for what you cannot see.

How pedestrians can manage physical blind spots:

- Never assume a vehicle operator can see you. If you are not certain you have been seen, act as if you have not.
- Make yourself visible before entering a travel aisle. Pause at corners and intersections rather than walking into them.
- Stay out of the swing arc and travel path of operating equipment. The space behind and beside a turning forklift is not a safe place to stand even briefly.
- If a vehicle is moving and you are not certain the operator knows you are there, get out of the travel path first and establish visibility second.

A real-world example:

A warehouse associate stepped out from between two parked trailers directly into the main travel aisle at the same moment a loaded forklift was making a turn. The forklift operator was carrying a load that blocked his forward view completely and was using his mirrors. The associate had assumed the aisle was clear because she could not see any traffic from her position between the trailers. Neither person could see the other until they were already in each other's path. The associate suffered a serious leg injury. Both had been doing exactly what they normally did. The intersection of two blind spots, one physical, one environmental, had never been formally assessed or controlled. After the incident, convex mirrors were installed at that corner and a painted pedestrian crossing was added fifteen feet before the aisle entry. Both fixes were suggested by team members who had felt uncomfortable at that corner for months and had not said so.

Team member engagement:

"Where in this facility are the worst physical blind spots for pedestrians and vehicle operators? Has anyone ever had a close call at one of those locations?"

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Wednesday – Perceptual Blind Spots: The Hazard You Stopped Seeing

Discussion:

Perceptual blind spots are trickier than physical ones because there is nothing wrong with your vision. You can see the hazard perfectly well. Your brain has just stopped telling you it matters. When something appears repeatedly in the same place with no consequence, the brain learns to treat it as background. It stops processing it as information that requires attention. The result is that a team member can look directly at a hazard and not register it as one. This is one of the main reasons experienced team members are sometimes at greater risk from perceptual blind spots than newer ones. A newer team member sees the hazard because everything is unfamiliar and the brain is paying attention to all of it. A team member who has been in the same environment for five years has trained their brain to filter out a large percentage of what they see because most of it has never required action. The hazard that got filtered out may be exactly the one that requires action today.

Common perceptual blind spots in a workplace:

Damage and wear that developed gradually. A crack in the floor that widened slowly over months. A guard that worked itself slightly loose over hundreds of machine cycles. A cord that got more frayed with each passing week. Each change was small enough to absorb into the normal picture. The change is significant.

Housekeeping hazards that became part of the landscape. A pallet that has been in the same spot for so long it has stopped being seen as something in the way. Material stacked a little higher than it should be for so long nobody notices the height anymore.

How to reset a perceptual blind spot:

- Walk your area like you are seeing it for the first time. Pretend you are a new team member on your first day. What would you notice that you have stopped noticing?
- Ask someone unfamiliar with your area to walk through it with you. Fresh eyes catch what familiar ones have learned to ignore.
- Compare what you do against what the written procedure says. Gaps between the two are often where perceptual blind spots live.

A real-world example:

A production line had a small oil leak from a fitting near the base of a press that had been present for so long it had become part of how the area looked. Team members had been stepping around the spot for months without thinking about it. A new supervisor walking the floor on her first week asked about the dark patch on the floor and was told it was just an old leak that had been there forever. She put in a work order the same afternoon. When maintenance fixed the fitting, they found the floor underneath had deteriorated significantly from prolonged oil exposure and required resurfacing. The slip hazard had been growing for months while everyone who knew the area had stopped seeing it. The person who caught it had been on the floor for four days.

Team member engagement:

"Is there something in your work area right now that you walk past every day without thinking about it, something that would probably get flagged if someone new walked in today?"

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Thursday – Helping Each Other See What We Cannot See Alone

Discussion:

Blind spots, both physical and perceptual, have one thing in common: you cannot see them yourself. That is what makes them blind spots. The only reliable way to know what you are missing is to have someone else who can see it tell you. The most effective defense against blind spots is not better equipment or better procedures, though both help. It is a team where people tell each other what they see. Where a team member who notices that a forklift operator does not seem to have seen them says something instead of assuming it will be fine. Where a team member who spots a hazard in another person's area mentions it rather than deciding it is not their problem. Where a newer team member who notices something that looks wrong asks about it rather than assuming the experienced people must have already decided it is acceptable.

What helping each other see looks like in practice:

Call out physical blind spots in the moment. If you can see that an operator cannot see you, make yourself known. Do not wait to be seen. A wave, a horn tap, a verbal call, anything that establishes your presence before you both occupy the same space.

Point out perceptual blind spots without making it personal. Saying "hey, I noticed that fitting is leaking again" is not a criticism of the person whose area it is. It is useful information. Most people receive it as such when it is offered that way.

Bring fresh eyes deliberately. When a task or an area has been the same for a long time, ask someone outside your immediate team to walk through it with you. Trade perspectives with a team member in a different area. The point is not inspection. It is the deliberate introduction of a perspective that has not been filtered by familiarity.

Make it safe to point things out. If pointing out a hazard in someone else's area or calling out a blind spot gets a defensive reaction, people stop doing it. The response to someone who says, "I noticed something" should always be "thank you."

A real-world example:

A maintenance technician was working in an area he did not normally cover and noticed that a pressure relief valve on a vessel was tagged with a date that was significantly past its inspection interval. He was not sure whether it was his place to say anything since it was not his area and he did not know the full context. He mentioned it to the area supervisor anyway: I was over in Bay 6 and noticed the PRV tag looked overdue. I do not know if there is a reason for that but wanted to flag it. The supervisor checked and confirmed the inspection had been missed during a scheduling change. The valve was tested the following day and found to be operating outside its acceptable range. It was replaced before the next production run. The technician had almost said nothing because he did not want to overstep. The area supervisor told him afterward that overstepping in situations like that is exactly what we want people to do.

Team member engagement:

"Is there a hazard or a blind spot in this facility that you have noticed in an area outside your own and never said anything about? What stopped you?"

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Friday – Week Wrap-Up

Discussion:

This week we covered a topic that runs underneath a lot of the incidents that happen in this kind of environment. We named two types of blind spots: the physical ones built into equipment and the environment, and the perceptual ones built into how the brain handles familiar things. We walked through how to manage physical blind spots as both operators and pedestrians. We talked about the perceptual blind spots that build up gradually in work areas and how fresh eyes are often the only reliable way to reset them. And we talked about the most important piece: that the only real defense against blind spots is a team that helps each other see.

You cannot see your own blind spots. That is the definition. What you can do is build habits that reduce their impact: slow down at the places where visibility is limited, make yourself known before assuming you have been seen, walk your area with fresh eyes regularly, and say something when you notice something in someone else's area. Those habits do not require any equipment or any program. They just require the decision to do them.

Weekly Challenge Report-Back:

At the start of this week, each person was asked to find one physical blind spot and one perceptual blind spot in their work area. Let's hear what people found.

"What physical blind spot did you identify? Where is it and what is the hazard?"

"What perceptual blind spot did you find? What is it and how long do you think it has been there?"

"Did anything you found this week need to be reported or fixed? Has that happened yet?"

Closing questions:

"What is one change to how we move through this facility, as operators or as pedestrians, that would reduce the risk from physical blind spots?"

"What would make it more normal on this team to point out what you see in each other's areas without it feeling like overstepping?"