

Toolbox Talks 2

021: Food and Drink

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Note any locations on site that have food and drink restrictions, posted or not.

What this Safety Talk covers:

Food and beverage safety practices for the individual.

Discussion notes:

OSHA construction regulations and food

OSHA addresses food from the viewpoint of operating food service facilities. This does help protect you, but it leaves many important food concerns unaddressed.

Food facts

These address low blood sugar, sugar high, and contamination.

- If you skip breakfast, you begin your day with low blood sugar. This reduces your mental clarity and awareness of potential dangers.
- Sugary snacks and sugary meals promote a corresponding spike in blood sugar. In addition to the long-term health consequences, the sugar high from excess intake can produce immediate problems with judgment, personality, and ability to focus.
- Not all sugary snacks affect you equally. If the snack also contains fats or proteins, the sugar spike will “spread out” and be less intense. A candy bar with nuts will produce less of a sugar high than one that is just sugar and some flavoring.
- When you’re running heavy conduit overhead or engaging in other physically demanding work, a snack helps you fight off fatigue. But eating that snack in the wrong location can cause you to ingest toxins. Eat only in designated areas.

Drink facts

- The same sugar high issues apply to drinks as to foods, exception the effect is stronger with drinks.
- Coffee early in the day can make you more alert while you are still coming out of your normal sleep cycle. Coffee later in the day may make you jittery, especially if you are taking decongestants, diet pills, or prescription medications.
- Toxins may be readily ingested along with a beverage. Take care where you drink anything, even water.

Food and drink safety practices

- Eat and drink only in designated areas, so you don’t inadvertently ingest toxins. These may be airborne or carried by rodents and insects.
- If you bring food from home, pay attention to food spoilage issues. Without refrigeration, foods like meat, egg salad, and yogurt will host huge bacteria populations. Store food at no less than 40°F to inhibit bacterial growth.
- Store food only in designated areas, so it doesn’t become contaminated.
- Dispose of food only in designated containers, for hygiene and pest control.

Review and discussion

1. How can eating too many sugary snacks affect your safety and the safety of those around you? Does this mean you can't ever eat a sugary snack, or does it mean simply to eat such things in moderation? *[Note to presenter: The general point here is to avoid a sugar high. Most people can tolerate some sweets with no problem. The guy who is always chugging a sports drink or cola or who eats candy bars throughout the day is likely to have a problem. The typical person who simply has a Snickers Bar at break time won't have adverse behavior from it. But each individual is different, so people need to be aware of their own eating habits and how these affect them personally.]*
2. Which commonly skipped meal should you not skip, and why?
3. How can eating or drinking in an area where such activity is restricted pose a safety risk? How do you know if it's restricted?
4. If there is no food or drink restriction sign posted, does that mean it's OK to eat in that area? Why or why not?
5. What are some examples of areas where eating and drinking is unsafe? *[Note to presenter: Chemical storage areas and places where grinding is taking place are two such areas.]*
6. What are some foods that are unsafe to store unless refrigerated? *[Note to presenter: We didn't list them in this document. People need to understand the concept and apply it to what they eat, rather than trying to memorize a huge list. If it's something that can spoil if left out for a day or so, then it needs to be refrigerated. Most protein sources, such as meat, dairy, and eggs, fall into this category.]*
7. There are no chemicals, insects, or airborne contaminants in the MV switchyard. So why is this an unsafe place in which to eat or drink? *[Note to presenter: This isn't a picnic area. A fault can cause one of the transformers to explode at any time. Don't be there if you don't have business there.]*
8. The designated eating area is a quarter mile away. There is a nearby restroom that is clean. What is the problem with eating there? *[Note to presenter: While some people would never entertain the idea of eating in a restroom, food containers are frequently found in these places. Eating in such a place is unsafe because a restroom is not cleaned to food facility standards.]*
9. What is wrong with storing food in an undesignated area? What are some of the risks this imposes?
10. As part of the fire permit process, you have been assigned to be the fire watch attendant while a small crew welds, cuts, and grinds brackets and mounting plates for several stepdown transformers that are being mounted above the ceiling. Is there anything wrong with drinking bottled water while you're standing there? What if you walk a ways off and drink it? *[Note to presenter: Obviously, the amount of airborne metal dust will preclude eating or drinking in the area. The fire watch attendant would be violating the permit by leaving the area.]*

Participant's Signature and Date
