

Toolbox Talks 2

031: Sabotage Detection and Reporting

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Review any company policies related to security, sabotage reporting, and terrorism.

What this Safety Talk covers:

Detecting and reporting sabotage.

Discussion notes:

Background

An urban myth says this word came about when Dutch workers threw their wooden shoes, called “sabots,” into their employers’ machinery. The real origin, however, relates to the idea of clumsiness and bungling. It later came to mean the deliberate destruction or interruption of equipment or processes. This practice was one way that workers fought back against labor practices that have long been outlawed. Today, sabotage serves no purpose for the employee and can easily cost many people their jobs or even their lives. In our post September 11 era, attention to sabotage is normal and expected.

Sabotage detection practices

- Notice what is out of place. For example, you are about to remove a panel cover and notice several loose screws. Nobody in your crew does such sloppy work.
- Be alert to unusual personnel. You tend to know the people on a project. Who is the new guy, and why is he by himself?
- Pay attention to unusual smells or noises, and report to the nearest authority why you find these unusual.

Anti-sabotage best practices

- Do not operate suspect machinery to “see if it has been sabotaged.”
- Don’t play detective. It’s not your job to investigate a problem or to “catch the perpetrator.” Attempts to do so may destroy valuable evidence and put you and others in further danger.
- Report people who are in places they aren’t supposed to be in, who violate security procedures, or who ask you to violate security procedures.
- If you suspect a saboteur, do not confront the person. Doing so can have unintended consequences, including a pipe wrench to the back of your head. Instead, note the facts and report them to your foreman and the security manager.
- If you suspect or see sabotage, don’t touch the item in question. Report it to your foreman. The security manager may need to photograph and document the item.
- If you suspect something is a bomb, don’t touch it. Leave the area immediately, and quietly notify others in the area that they must evacuate. Don’t give any more information than that, until you have reported the suspected bomb to the nearest authority (this may be the area supervisor, a security official, or your foreman).
- Never joke about sabotage, bombs, or related issues (on the job or off).
- Take all threats seriously, and report them at once.

Review and discussion

1. What are some dangers sabotage can pose on this job, and what is some equipment that, if sabotaged, can cost people their lives? *[Note to presenter: The goal of this question is to make people aware of key areas or equipment where alertness to potential sabotage should be higher.]*
2. What are some signs that sabotage may have taken place?
3. What are some things you should be alert to, be aware of, and pay attention to? Why?
4. What should you do if you suspect sabotage?
5. What should you do if you see something that just simply doesn't belong? For example, you see a brick of putty in the bottom of a switchgear panel. What should you do?
6. If you're not sure something is a bomb but don't want to make a fool of yourself with a false alarm, how can you make sure it's a bomb before reporting it? *[Note to presenter: This is obviously a trick question. The point is you aren't supposed to make sure something is a bomb. If it's out of place and you suspect it may be a bomb, you report it to those who can take the appropriate action. You also need to quietly alert others to leave the area.]*
7. You just saw someone attach a suspicious-looking box with an antenna on it to the bottom of a large transformer and then walk off. You're in good shape. You know you can take this guy with no problem, and beat out of him whatever information you need to find out what exactly that box was. What should you do? *[Note to presenter: This is a classic error, made in the heat of excitement. Our protective instincts tell us to go after the threat and neutralize it. But, this isn't a wise approach. You don't know if that other person is carrying a knife or other weapon. Allowing that person an opportunity, no matter how slight, to disable you so you can't report to the right people or at least sound the alarm does not help.]*
8. One of the electricians working on your project doesn't know you're there as he reaches into a panel, snips several wires, and closes the door. Nobody else is around, so you're suspicious. But maybe it's nothing. After all, why would anybody deliberately destroy wiring in a panel? What should be your next step?
9. You and a partner are performing rotational testing on some motors that were installed last week. Your job is to bump the motors and rewire the winding connections if they spin in the wrong direction. Upon opening the weatherhead of one motor, something doesn't look right. Then you notice that one of the lead pairs doesn't have the motor lead rubber tape on it but has only phasing tape on it. Should you energize the motor and see what happens? Why or why not? What else might be wrong?
10. A coworker asks you to help pull a prank on another coworker. This involves putting a fake bomb from a gag shop into a panel in which that person will be working. You'll both be right there to let the other person know right away that it was just a joke. How should you respond to the person who wants to liven things up a bit?

Participant's Signature and Date
