

Toolbox Talks 2

046: Unsafe Acts Vs. Unsafe Conditions

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Develop a short list of unsafe conditions that could be encountered on this site, what actions can reduce the danger, and what unsafe acts can increase the danger. Be prepared to use these as examples.

What this Safety Talk covers:

Most injuries occur not due to unsafe conditions, but due to unsafe acts. This Safety Talk addresses differences between the two.

Discussion notes:

Background

People often focus on the idea of unsafe conditions, while ignoring their own unsafe acts. As a team, we can *reduce* unsafe conditions. But we cannot entirely eliminate them. Only you can prevent your unsafe acts. Your actions can create unsafe conditions, clear those conditions up, allow you to work safely in unsafe conditions, or create a danger where conditions are safe.

Some conditions can be made safer, but never safe. For example, switchgear is made safer through the use of metal enclosures. But live switchgear always presents an arc blast hazard. Only your safe acts when working around switchgear can make you safe.

Unsafe conditions and unsafe acts compared

- Current backfeed on a locked out circuit is an unsafe condition. Working on that circuit before using test equipment to verify it's de-energized is an unsafe act. So is working on it before tracking down and isolating all possible supply paths.
- An unsafe condition exists when the equipment you need to work on has springs or other energy sources in addition to the electrical ones. Performing lockout/tagout on the electrical energy sources is a safe act. Stopping there, rather than identifying and isolating all possible energy sources, is an unsafe act.
- An unsafe condition exists when combustibles and fluorescent lamps are stored in an electrical closet that contains a distribution transformer and panel. An unsafe act is removing the panel cover while those items are still in that room.
- Oil leaked onto the floor is an unsafe condition. Unsafe acts include leaving it there and not reporting it.
- You have an unsafe condition when you can smell gasoline fumes from a portable generator. Unsafe acts include refueling with a paper funnel and closing the door that was providing ventilation.
- A ladder not rated for the load your job requires you to put on it is an unsafe condition. Using that ladder for this particular job is an unsafe act.
- A confined space is inherently an unsafe condition. Entering that space before you review the confined space entry permit and meet its conditions is an unsafe act.
- When you are taking voltage and current measurements in a 480V panel, you are working in an unsafe condition. You are exposed to potential shock and arc blast. It's an unsafe act to hold one measuring probe in each hand. It's an unsafe act to open the panel before putting on the correct arc blast PPE.

Review and discussion

1. Why is it not possible to make your work conditions 100% safe?
2. If your work conditions will always present some danger, how can you be safe while working?

