

In this issue of the Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) Listserv – May 4, 2023

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1. Bicycle Safety & Motorcycle Safety Months

Situational preparedness is so important that this listserv provides resources to promote safe navigation of roadways, whatever the method of transportation.

Motorcyclists and bicyclists are more vulnerable to crashes than vehicles on the road. Per mile travelled, motorcyclists are 27 times more likely than people in passenger cars to die in a traffic crash. The number of bicycle incidents in the United States has increased 29% over a recent eight-year period.

With more riders on the roads as weather improves, the need for additional precautions arises. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has designated May as Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month, and the League of American Bicyclists recognizes May as National Bicyclist Safety Month. The National Safety Council (NSC) supports both of these efforts.

Remember that both motorcycles and bicycles are relatively small, and thus drivers often do not see these modes of transportation. Some safety tips that apply to both motorcycle and bicycle riders are:

- Be sure your bicycle or motorcycle is “ride ready”. Check tire pressure, brakes, etc.
- Know and follow the rules of the road.
- Wear bright or reflective clothing that is durable with arms and legs covered, sturdy shoes or boots, and a helmet that conforms to the appropriate design standards.
- Assume you are invisible to other motorists and position yourself to be seen.
- Signal every turn or lane change.
- Drive defensively in the same direction as traffic. Pay special attention at intersections where half of all collisions occur. Always look out for cars turning or backing out of driveways.
- Don’t weave in and out of lanes, or ride on the shoulder or between lanes.

- Watch for hazards like potholes, manhole covers, oil slicks, puddles, debris, railroad tracks and gravel.

The best way to reduce your odds of dying or being severely injured in a crash is to get educated:

- The Motorcycle Safety Foundation (<https://www.msf-usa.org/library.aspx#ridercourse-materials-link>) offers safety booklets, downloadable Rider Course handbooks, videos, quick tips, white papers and more. They can also help you find a motorcycle safety course near you.
- RideApart (<https://www.rideapart.com/features/254912/10-common-motorcycle-accidents-and-how-to-avoid-them/>) publishes a list of the 10 most common causes for motorcycle accidents and how to avoid them, complete with videos. Many of the tips at this site apply equally to bicyclists.
- UNL's Campus Recreation department provides resources including clinics related to safe bicycling, maintenance and more. Find a class here: <https://crec.unl.edu/activities/clinics> .
- A core activity of the League of American Bicyclists is education. Find smart bicycling tips and videos at <https://bikeleague.org/ridesmart>

Get educated and ride safely so you do not become a statistic!

Resources

- CPSC (Consumer Product Safety Commission) Which Helmet for Which Activity? (reference chart on helmet standards) <https://www.cpsc.gov/safety-education/safety-guides/sports-fitness-and-recreation-bicycles/which-helmet-which-activity/>
- MAY IS BIKE MONTH, The League of American Bicyclists <https://bikeleague.org/bikemonth>
- Bike Safely and Enjoy Your Ride, NSC <https://www.nsc.org/home-safety/tools-resources/seasonal-safety/summer/bicycles>
- Motorcycle Roadway Safety, NSC <https://www.nsc.org/road-safety/safety-topics/motorcycle-safety>
- Bicycle Safety, NHTSA <https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/bicycle-safety>
- Motorcycle Safety, NHTSA <https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/motorcycle-safety>
- Walter, L. (2012, May 15). 6 Tips for Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month. Retrieved April 27, 2021, from <https://www.ehstoday.com/safety/article/21915121/6-tips-for-motorcycle-safety-awareness-month>

2. Prevent/Reduce the Risk of Heat Illness

The United States Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) and the National Weather Service team up to encourage everyone to recognize the warning signs for heat illness. Heat exhaustion and dehydration due to heat are some of the leading weather-related killers in the United States and result in dozens of fatalities and thousands of heat-related illnesses each year. On average, extreme heat has killed more people in the last ten years than any other weather phenomena.

We often associate heat-related illness with outdoor operations such as farm work, landscaping, and research “in the field.” However, EHS routinely reviews injury reports from employees working **INSIDE** an unconditioned building (e.g., warehouse, storeroom) or areas of a building prone to heat build-up (e.g., kitchens, laundry, autoclave rooms, etc.).

Working in the heat stresses the body and can lead to illness or even death in severe cases. Exposure to heat can also increase the risk of other injuries because of sweaty hands, fogged-up safety glasses, dizziness, and burns from hot surfaces. Most heat-related health problems can be prevented or the risk of developing them can be reduced.

Following are two main categories of risk factors the worker should evaluate when contemplating outdoor work:

- **Weather Conditions.** The risk of heat stress is relative to temperature, humidity, sunlight, and wind speed. High temperature, high humidity, direct sunlight and low wind speed make the worst combination. If possible, schedule strenuous work for the cooler parts of the day.
- **Personal Factors and Physical Demands.** The risk of heat stress increases with physical demands. For example, a worker who is walking is at higher risk than a worker who is riding in a vehicle. Older workers, obese workers, and persons taking certain types of medication, such as antihistamines, are at a greater risk for heat illness.

It may not always be possible to work only in cooler parts of the day. The risk of heat-related illness can be reduced by:

- **Acclimation.** Build up tolerance to heat by short exposures before undertaking longer periods of work in a hot environment.
- **Appropriate clothing.** Light, loose clothing and a hat are the recommended clothing of choices.
- **Hydration.** Drink 8-16 ounces of water before working in the heat. Drink 4-8 ounces of water or electrolytes every 15-20 minutes while working in

the heat. AVOID alcohol, coffee, tea, or soda pop, which further dehydrate the body.

- **Adequate Rest Periods.** Work at a steady pace. Take breaks when your body signals you need one, preferably in shaded or cool areas.
- **Education.** Heat stress can manifest in a number of ways, all to be taken seriously, and some requiring medical assistance to avoid permanent aftereffects. Workers should know the signs and symptoms of these conditions so they can take proper action if they or their co-workers are affected.

OSHA in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has developed a free smartphone **Heat Safety Tool** that calculates a heat index, identifies the associated risk level and provides reminders about protective measures that should be taken to protect workers from heat-related illness. The free app is available for either Android or iPhone.

Further recommendations from NIOSH for those working in hot environments include:

- Limit time in the heat and/or increase recovery time in a cool environment.
- Use a buddy system so workers can observe each other for signs of heat intolerance.
- Have adequate amounts of cool, potable water near the work area and encourage each other to drink frequently.

While we think of summer as the “hot” time of year outdoors, sometimes temperatures and humidity levels in the spring or fall can reach dangerous levels as well. In addition, certain indoor work areas may be “hot” year-around. Remember to practice heat safety wherever you are and with whatever tasks you are doing. Heat-related illness and death are preventable.

Resources

- VIDEO. 60-Second Video Message on Heat Illness Prevention. USDepartmentofLabor. Duration: 1:02 minutes. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipWmbc0d_Lc
- VIDEO. 7 Ways to Beat the Heat – Hot Weather Hazards – Preventing Illness & Deaths in Hot Environments. Safety Memos. Duration: 3:28 minutes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYnj1G94e6Y>
- Excessive Heat Awareness and Safety <https://www.weather.gov/rah/heat>
- OSHA Health and Safety Topics: Heat <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/heatstress/>

- OSHA-NIOSH Heat Safety Tool App
<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/heatstress/heatapp.html>
- OSHA Water. Rest. Shade <https://www.osha.gov/heat/>
- EHS **Heat Stress** SOP <https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-heatstress.pdf>
- National Institute for Health & Safety (NIOSH) Safety & Health Topics: *Heat Stress* <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/heatstress/>
- Heat Safety Tips and Resources <https://www.weather.gov/safety/heat>

3. Get to Know New EHS Staff

We would like to introduce you to some EHS staff you may not have had the chance to meet yet:

- Hello, my name is **Jack Carter** and I recently joined UNL's EHS Department as a technician. I have a B.S. in Fisheries & Wildlife, and a minor in Criminology & Criminal Justice. As an EHS Technician, my duties include conducting Safety & Compliance surveys of laboratory spaces on campus, while also assisting with the collection of Chemical waste, Bio-waste, and Radioactive waste from laboratory spaces. In my spare time, I enjoy travelling, gardening, and creating art.
- Hi, my name is **Anna Jungck** and I recently joined the biosafety team at EHS. I graduated from UNO with a B.S. in biology and a minor in psychology. I conduct Safety and Compliance surveys, review IBC protocols, and assist in other biosafety matters. My passions outside of work include coffee, trivia nights, time with family and friends, and being outdoors with my dog.
- Hello, my name is **Cameron Spaulding**, I have recently joined UNL's EHS department as an EHS technician. I have a B.S. in Biochemistry with minors in Math and Physics. As an EHS Technician, my duties include conducting Safety & Compliance surveys of laboratory spaces on campus, while also assisting with the collection of chemical waste, Bio-waste, and Radioactive waste from laboratory spaces. On my off hours I like to read, cook, and scuba dive whenever I get to travel.

4. 25 Steps to a Safer Office (Part 1)

It is obvious that safety and health hazards exist in laboratories, kitchens, workshops. However, there are a surprising number of hazards in an office setting. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 80,410 office workers suffered on-the-job injuries in 2008. Many of these injuries could be prevented had workers recognized the risks and implemented simple workplace modifications to help mitigate them. We will review the major areas of injury in an office-type setting and suggest steps you can take to reduce the risk of injury.

Slips, trips and falls, the most common type of office injury sidelined 25,790 workers in the United States in 2008. Several hazards contribute to these injuries, although most can be significantly reduced by taking mitigation steps.

1. **Stay clutter-free.** Boxes, files, and other items should be stored in their proper location not in walkways. Cords should be properly secured and covered so they do not stretch across walkways or under rugs.
2. **Step on up.** Never stand on chairs. Always use a step stool or step ladder to reach something at elevated height. Be sure the step stool/ladder is fully opened on a level, firm surface.
3. **Maintain a clear line of vision.** It is easy to collide when making turns in hallways and around blind corners or cubicle walls. Navigate slowly when approaching such areas.
4. **Get a grip.** Carpeting and other skid-resistant surfaces can help reduce falls. Non-carpeted areas can become slick when wet so look carefully where you walk to see if the potential for a damp/wet surface exists – around water fountains, entryways, etc.

Another major type of injury in an office setting is being struck by or caught by an object. Incidents of this nature accounted for 15,680 injuries in 2008.

5. **Shut the drawer.** File cabinets and other drawers near the floor are easy to trip over as they are typically not in your line of sight. File cabinets can tip over if drawers higher up are open and the cabinet is not secured. Be sure to always close drawers.
6. **Safe stacking.** Proper storage of heavy items can help reduce the number of injuries. Store heavy objects close to the floor. Don't stack items. A large stack can cause major injuries if knocked over. Never exceed the load capacity of shelves or storage units.

Ergonomic injuries are common in an office setting. Workers often spend the bulk of their day seated at a desk and working on a computer.

7. **Adjust equipment.** Chairs, work surfaces, monitor stands, etc., should all be adjusted to the proper height.
8. **Set up.** Workers should be aware of the ideal set up for their workstation and how to use/adjust their equipment.
9. **Keep your feet on the floor.** Unless feet are kept on the floor a chair will not be able to reduce pain and discomfort. If needed a foot rest may be used.
10. **Use document holders.** Typing from hard copy can lead to neck strain in it is necessary to repeatedly look down to desk and back to computer screen. Keep reference materials close to the monitor using a document holder to reduce the need to change focus which is a benefit to the eyes as well as the neck.
11. **Use correct mouse placement.** The mouse should always be placed beside the keyboard.

Do not become complacent about safety because you work in an office setting. Remain aware of the potential hazards of your workspace. In the June listserv we will review the rest of the 25 steps to a safer office.

Resources

- Claussen, L. (2022, September 2). Recognizing hidden dangers: 25 steps to a safer office. *Safety+Health a NSC Publication*. Retrieved April 13, 2023, from https://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/recognizing-hidden-dangers-25-steps-to-a-safer-office-2?utm_source=daily&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=daily

5. Was It a Near Hit?

When there is an occurrence that, given a minor shift in time or position would have resulted in serious injury but did not, we tend to take a deep breath and forget such occurrences as soon as they happen. But a “near miss” might more accurately be thought of as a “near hit,” terminology that emphasizes the potential for injury rather than a focus on avoidance.

The Chancellor’s University Safety Committee (CUSC) encourages Near Miss/Close Call reporting and also encourages reporting of unsafe practices. To support that effort, the EHS **Near Miss/Close Call Incident Reporting Form** allows for reporting of unsafe practices either self-identified or anonymously.

By reporting all “near misses”, “close calls,” or unsafe practices, you are contributing to a safer and healthier campus environment. Information reported is shared throughout the University for educational/awareness purposes. Specific identifying information (e.g., names, departments, etc.) is not included in informational articles. Participation benefits the entire campus community. Per the Injury and Illness Prevention Plan there is no risk of repercussion for reporting a situation or hazard.

Next time you see something and think, “This could have ended up very badly,” consider the situation a “near hit.” Report that circumstance online to help others throughout the university who may encounter a similar situation stay safe.

Resources

- Near-Miss/Close Call Incident Reporting Form <https://ehs.unl.edu/near-missclose-call-incident-reporting-form>

ADOPT SAFETY AS YOUR ATTITUDE – DON’T LEARN BY ACCIDENT!

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