

Sandia National Laboratories



Construction News Sense

Don't Let Down After Focused Operations

Sandia National Laboratories/New Mexico's Facilities Management and Operations Center (FMOC) recently had an event we would like to share. We know from data that most car accidents occur within four miles of the home. How does this happen? How could we be that focused through all of the unknown terrain of the trip and then get involved in an accident this close to home? Do we really let down mentally after difficult or high-focused operations, and is this natural? Do we often perceive low risk as low consequence, even when it comes to wearing jewelry?

At approximately 10:00 a.m. on August 8, 2013, a subcontract high-voltage worker received a significant contusion to the left ring finger while stepping off of a vehicle. The worker completed a drilling operation using truck-mounted equipment, removed their gloves, and while exiting the vehicle from the rear area of equipment operation, caught their left finger ring on an edge of the truck. The vehicle is standard for this type of operation. An examination of the truck revealed no sharp edges. The last step is slightly longer due to the fact the vehicle is all-terrain and ground clearance is an engineered feature. The worker is a twenty-five year journeyman and very experienced with this vehicle; however, the worker is new to the current company.

The pre-task plan was in place and covered the work operations (hazards and controls) for the day. The plan identified laceration, drilling, fall protection and cave-in hazards with controls. The worker did not identify catching their ring on the vehicle while leaving as a potential hazard.

What did we know about the event?

- The worker was qualified for all of the tasks.
- The worker was new to the company.
- The task of getting out of the truck was simple in comparison to the tasks that had just been completed (drilling).
- The worker was not in a hurry.
- The same model vehicle was used for the previous 20 years.
- The worker always had a wedding ring on during work with no issues in the past.

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Why did the accident happen?

- The task of exiting from the truck was not a hazard to the worker.
- Complacency is natural after years of success.
- An inaccurate risk perception is normal and we need reminders.

Is there anything we can do?

- Have a questioning attitude for everyday tasks. While it is impossible to maintain the same intensity for all activities, we need to rotate our questioning attitude appropriately to cover daily operations.
- Regularly challenge our preconceptions and assumptions.
- Consider the “what ifs” prior to taking any action.
- Offer challenging questions in a spirit of helpfulness; be open to being questioned by others.
- Just as the airplane pilot's rule says, “Take care of the little things.”

Jewelry safety for industrial workers is often overlooked. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration do not have a specific standard for jewelry. The hazard is clearly communicated in many standards and we are all trained to know that loose clothing and jewelry are all potential hazards along with conductive hazards.

Jewelry includes watches, wedding rings, bracelets, necklaces, body piercings and facial jewelry. Jewelry at work is a major safety hazard and can cause serious injuries. Jewelry can get caught in power tools or can get stuck against objects, conveyors, and moving parts of machinery.

Often when we see injuries with no standard attached to them, we simply say there was nothing we could do to prevent the event. We need to be a learning organization and expand our thoughts and communication on behaviors, human performance and potential high-consequence concerns. By raising our awareness and thinking about possible “what if” scenarios, we can reduce our injuries on and off the job.

Greg Kirsch, FESH Lead 4878

What If!