Complacency – by John McAuley

My dictionary defines complacency this way, “self-satisfaction accompanied by unawareness of actual danger or deficiencies.”

I am not sure of the statistics; however, there is no doubt in my mind that numerous accidents have occurred due to allowing ourselves to become complacent in our everyday activity (on and off the job).

I have often said that working safely is not easy, nor is it automatic. We have to work at it with the highest degree of awareness.

If we just stop for a moments and think we all can come up with instances that we did become complacent. It happens to us because we perform many functions on an almost continuous basis. Many of our jobs are repetitive in nature, and the more we repeat what we are doing, the better the chance that we are becoming complacent without even realizing it. Therein lies the potential danger, the danger of complacency.

We must remember that life is what happens, when we are making other plans. We become complacent about our personal safety by repeated exposure to situations without consequence.

We take shortcuts and with the absence of consequents, cause us to become more lax about our personal safety, in other words we are becoming complacent.

Personal safety is not like a light switch that you can turn on or off. The personal safety switch must continuously be in the on position. Just because we feel safe, does not mean we are safe. On the contrary, “feeling safe all the time”, could be the biggest threat to our well-being, because we are drifting into that complacent mode.

One key to avoid the complacency trap is to form “safety habits”. Habits that you do over and over until they override your former unsafe behavior and become automated.

Habits such as, wearing gloves, glasses, proper foot wear, safety harness on and ready to tie off, face shield when grinding, removing tripping hazards, attending safety meetings and paying attention, using seat belts, tying off a ladder etc.

Is it not better to form these types of automatic habits, and let them become the norm?

There is an old saying that familiarity breeds contempt. To paraphrase, I would say that, familiarity breeds complacency. Let’s work in a manner that we ensure we do not fall into the complacency trap.

Contagious Complacency

It is very unfortunate that complacency can become a habit for some. We tend to become satisfied and comfortable in doing things in ways that are dangerous to the point they have become unaware (or arguably, uncaring) about the dangers. This can have catastrophic consequences.

A complacent employee can “infect” other employees. When this happens, the consequences can be significant. In fact, an entire crew can become complacent. And worst of all, an entire jobsite can become complacent. When this happens, the jobsite can sink into a comfortable rut and become arrogant.

The employees can begin to believe they are so good at what they do that a bad outcome will never happen... because it never does. The success of past outcomes can contribute to complacency. When employees perform in ways that are not consistent with best practices – and get away with it (i.e., no bad outcome) – it can build confidence that is based in luck, not ability.

The first step in overcoming the curse of complacency—employees must be aware of the job they are facing, as well as their environment. This awareness comes from becoming a student of best practices.
What is Defensive Driving?

Although defensive driving goes hand-in-hand with safe driving practices, it requires a slightly different approach.

Defensive driving means always anticipating what may happen next, and being prepared to take action to avoid danger. To successfully do this, you must be constantly monitor what is happening on the road, and planning ahead.

Defensive Driving Techniques

- Always have an escape route in mind in case an emergency situation arises. To effectively do this, you must continually be aware of the space around you.
- Always try to keep a safe distance from the vehicles around you.
- Don't be content with just looking at the space directly in front of you. Scan the path ahead of you at least 12-15 seconds.
- Look in every direction before crossing an intersection, even when you have the right-of-way.
- Exercise increased caution anytime you have a limited field of vision, such as when approaching the top of a hill.
- Be aware of school buses, ice-cream trucks, mail trucks, and delivery trucks. Each represents an above-average chance that someone may be leaving or entering a vehicle.
- Be especially vigilant in construction zones and around emergency scenes, as other drivers may not be properly focused on their driving.
- Slow down when around erratic or dangerous drivers, as they increase the likelihood that an accident will happen.
- Automatically reduce speed when conditions warrant it, such as when driving in rain, snow, fog, or on icy roads. Be proactive, and realize that it’s not safe to drive at the posted speed limit in all circumstances.
- Be especially careful when around parked cars, as someone could dart out from between the cars. Also, drivers may be opening a car door, or trying to pull out of a parking space into your line of travel.
- Be wary of drivers with out-of-state plates or rental cars, as well as drivers who have a map out or their interior lights on. All point to drivers who may not be familiar with the area, and thus may be confused or distracted.
- Watch out for slippery conditions during the first several minutes after it begins to rain, as the rain will mix with the oily residue on the road surface.
- Anticipate the worst moves that drivers around you could make, and know how to safely react to each move.
- Try to keep your vehicle as visible as possible to other drivers, and whenever you can, stay out of other drivers’ blind spots.
- Stay well in back of trucks with cargo that could easily spill. These vehicles could send debris flying into the road, or into your line of vision.
- Stay well behind a vehicle with an accumulation of snow on its roof, as this situation can create instant white-out conditions for anyone stuck driving behind the vehicle.

“Turkey Day”...With Thanksgiving approaching, you may be wondering what kind of turkey to buy for your big feast. The choices can be a little confusing. Check this quick guide to learn what the different labels mean:

- **Butterball**-Despite the name, these turkeys don’t actually have any butter. The turkeys come fresh or frozen. The fresh ones have no added ingredients. The frozen birds are injected in the breast with a solution of vegetable oil, water, salt, emulsifiers, and a preservative. The solution is made to enhance the flavor and provide moisture that is lost during the freezing process.
- **Kosher**-Kosher turkeys are soaked in cold saltwater even before the feathers are plucked. The process draws out the blood and impurities, following Jewish dietary laws. Because they go through both rabbinical and USDA inspections, the birds are very clean. The saltwater soak also makes for a more flavorful bird. Kosher poultry are fed an all-natural diet with no hormones or antibiotics.
- **Free-range**-These birds are fed an all-natural diet and aren’t confined. Often, the birds eat natural feed that is not organic but is tested for chemical residue. Generally, they have more breast meat, about 50 percent less fat, and a quarter fewer calories than regular turkeys. However, some consumers have found that free-range turkeys are a little tougher. That’s because they are less fatty, so be careful not to overcook them.

If you have any questions/comments-please contact editor, Tricia Hanrath, at thanrath@sccinc.com

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