



TIPS FOR INCREASING WORKPLACE SAFETY FOR OLDER WORKERS

The American Society of Safety Engineers, with 35,000 occupational safety, health and environmental professional global members, is concerned with recent statistics that show the age group with the highest number of workplace fatalities in the U.S. in 2010 were those 65 years and older followed by the 55-64 age group, the 45-54 age group, and, the 16-17 age group. By 2020, it is expected that one-fourth of the workforce will be over age 55.

To help employers, employees and communities increase workplace safety for older workers, and knowing there is no one-size-fits-all solution, ASSE is suggesting the following safety tips (for more please go to www.asse.org):

Health

- Ensure regular health checks for shift workers over 40
- Ensure annual eye exams for inspectors, and current eye exams and correct vision prescription for all workers

Work Station

- Increase illumination by 20 percent
- Use task lighting to make low-contrast targets (defects) more visible
- Avoid using small print in instructions, orders, or on equipment -- use 11-point font or larger
- Avoid using small laptop screens, connect the laptop to an external monitor
- Use LCD displays for reduced glare, use a 17 inch monitor or larger, if possible
- Increase monitor brightness and add color contrast
- Place document holders and monitors at the same distance from the eyes

General

- Improve illumination for walking surfaces and stairs
- Ensure a higher coefficient of friction between the operator's fingers and the tool surface when precision tools are used
- Use a foot pedal from a sitting rather than standing position
- Keep shelves between knees and shoulder height whenever possible
- Provide both visual and audio signals to machine operators when emergency situations arise
- Slow the rate of information presented
- Eliminate heavy lifts, elevated work from ladders, and long reaches
- Design work floors and platforms with smooth and solid decking while still allowing some cushioning
- Reduce static standing time
- Install chain actuators for valve hand wheels or similar control devices – this brings the control manipulation to ground level
- Install skid resistant material for flooring and especially for stair treads
- Install shallow-angle stairways in place of ladders when space permits and where any daily elevated access is needed to complete a task
- Utilize hands-free, volume-adjustable telephone equipment
- Increase task rotation which will reduce the strain of repetitive motion
- Lengthen time requirements between steps in a task
- Consider necessary reaction time when assigning older workers to tasks
- Show older workers how to evaluate their workstations and workspaces so they can help eliminate conditions that lead to fatigue and discomfort
- Provide opportunities for practice and time to develop task familiarity

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August 2012 * www.asse.org for more tips and information * 847-699-2929 * ASSE* 1800 E. Oakton St.* Des Plaines, IL 60018

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