

CELL PHONES IN THE WORKPLACE: *A Dangerous Distraction*

This easy-to-use Leader's Guide is provided to assist in conducting a successful presentation. Featured are:

INTRODUCTION: A brief description of the program and the subject that it addresses.

PROGRAM OUTLINE: Summarizes the program content. If the program outline is discussed before the video is presented, the entire program will be more meaningful and successful.

PREPARING FOR AND CONDUCTING THE PRESENTATION: These sections will help you set up the training environment, help you relate the program to site-specific incidents, and provide program objectives for focusing your presentation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Questions may be copied and given to participants to stimulate discussion about the program, its safety lessons and universal theme.

INTRODUCTION

Our cell phones are powerful tools that allow us to have instant access to information and communication. When used appropriately, these devices can make our lives easier and more enjoyable, but when used at the wrong time and in the wrong manner, these same devices can get us in trouble at work and cause serious injury. This program discusses how sending and receiving text messages can cause us to lose focus on doing our jobs safely and efficiently as well as the importance of always following your company's policy regarding cell phone use. Also featured are several workplace scenarios that illustrate the tragic consequences of ignoring these policies in order to text when it is unsafe or prohibited.

Other topics include how cell phone use adversely affects our production level, following the company plan for emergency contact, appropriate use of company-owned cell phones and why we must have the courage to speak up and refuse to participate in unsafe and inappropriate texting.

INSTRUCTIONAL CONTENT

WORKPLACE CELL PHONE USE CAN BE DANGEROUS

- While most of us would never consider doing a puzzle or juggling while performing our jobs, we often don't give a second thought to sending and receiving text messages as we complete our daily tasks.
- Of the 3,000,000,000 texts sent each day, a large number of them are now being sent from and received in the workplace. Not surprisingly, we are now seeing a rise in workplace injuries related to text messaging and other phone and PDA-related activities.
- We are all aware of the hazards of texting while driving, but sending and receiving text messages at work can be just as dangerous.
- Just like other workplace distractions such as chattering with co-workers, horseplay or having our mind on something other than our task, being distracted by using the phone also causes us to lose our focus on the job at hand.

DISTRACTED FORKLIFT OPERATOR SERIOUSLY INJURES CO-WORKER

- Forklift operator Ramon Jamison discusses what happened the day he was distracted by texting and struck a co-worker.
- "I usually keep my phone in my locker every morning, but my wife was having an ultrasound that morning and I wanted to know if we were having a little boy or a little girl, so I kept my phone with me," says Ramon.
- "I was moving stacks of pallets in the storage yard when I heard the message alert go off," he adds.

- Ramon says he was so excited to find out that he didn't even think about not checking his text. He looked down and had to focus on his phone for a moment to select and read the text.
- "That's when Ronnie suddenly walked in front of the forklift and I didn't see him until I heard him shout," he continues. "The thought of anyone walking in front of my forklift was the furthest thing from my mind."
- What should have been one of the best days of his life ended up being one of the worst. Not only did Ramon lose his job for violating his company's rules on cell phone use, his actions caused the death of a friend and a co-worker.

USING CELL PHONES AT WORK ADVERSELY AFFECTS OUR PRODUCTION LEVEL

- Most organizations have restrictions regarding cell phone use and texting. It is your responsibility to know how your company's rules apply to you and always follow them accordingly.
- Of course, even if no published rules exist, attempting to use your phone for texting, updating social media or even checking the weather while performing any type of hazardous job function or driving is just plain dangerous and should not be attempted.
- It's just takes a little common sense to distinguish those tasks where texting isn't particularly hazardous and those where being distracted, even for a moment, could cause major injuries and property damage.
- Of course, even in a non-hazardous situation, sending and receiving personal text messages and performing other phone based activities not only takes your focus off of your job tasks, it also takes time; time that should be spent performing your job.
- Simply stated, employees who are texting at work are not doing what they are getting paid to do. For this reason, these workers may be subject to disciplinary action.
- Using our phones to do such things as watch TV, stay updated on news and social media and play video games affects our production level. Phone use in the work place must be restricted; the impact to safety and productivity is just too great to do otherwise.
- If cell phone use is prohibited at your workplace, hiding in closets and frequently visiting restrooms to send and receive texts is still a violation of company policy for which you may also be punished.
- Leaving your workstation unattended so you can leave the building to use your phone is also a bad idea.
- Instead, simply get in the habit of sending and receiving text messages before you clock in, during one of your breaks or after you clock out.

MACHINE OPERATOR'S SPLIT-SECOND DECISION RESULTS IN TRAUMATIC INJURY

- Believe it or not, even though you may want to stay in constant contact with your social and family life, very few things really require that you do so.
- Machine operator Iris McMurray explains how her desire for instant access to information led to an instant injury as well.
- "During lunch, my boyfriend and I were texting each other about our last minute weekend trip to the beach. He was trying to find a nice hotel that still had a vacancy," says Iris.
- "We're not supposed to take our phones into the production area, but everybody does it, so I figured it would be okay. Plus, I was really eager to find out if he found a place to stay," she adds.

- Iris said she worked for a while and then noticed she had a text from her boyfriend concerning their hotel room.
- “It happened so fast! As I tried to reply, I somehow dropped the phone right into my machine,” she says. “My first reaction was to grab it before it got eaten by the machine, or worse yet, jam up the production line.” When Iris dropped her phone, she tried to grab it off of the machine’s conveyor, but her hand was crushed when it was caught between the conveyor belt and the roller.
- I’ll have to live with that split second decision for the rest of my life. If I had just followed company policy, and just waited until my afternoon break. If I had just thought about how dangerous texting around that machine was. Now, every time I look at my hand, I wonder, what if?” Iris concludes.
- Iris could have waited to correspond with her boyfriend; it really would not have made any difference other than her eagerness to know the weekend plans. We’ve all heard the expression, “Curiosity killed the cat.” In this case, a desire for instant information injured Iris.

FOLLOWING THE COMPANY PLAN FOR EMERGENCY CONTACT

- Of course, most companies have a procedure that allows employees to be reached in an actual emergency. It may be calling into the switchboard and asking you to be paged, or it may be calling the direct line of the shift supervisor or plant manager, who will then come get you from your workstation.
- Whatever the plan, make sure your family and friends know what it is so you may be contacted in a true emergency.
- Don’t use the excuse of needing to be reached in an emergency as a reason to violate company policies limiting phone use.

APPROPRIATE USE OF COMPANY-OWNED CELL PHONES

- Of course, while many companies forbid texting and cell phone use altogether, others allow it under certain circumstances. In fact, some employers actually prefer to communicate with certain workers through text messaging or email sent to a cell phone or PDA.
- Be aware that if your company provides you with a cell phone, any messages you send or receive on it are considered company property. Your employer has the right to monitor these messages, so you should not expect them to be private.
- When using a company-owned cell phone, refrain from sending any messages that could be considered harassing, pornographic or disruptive to other employees.
- Messages that may offend others based on race, gender, age, sexual orientation, religious beliefs or political affiliation should not be sent.
- When communicating with your supervisors by text message, don’t discuss such things as your pay, hours worked, medical issues, absences or similar matters. These matters should be handled formally in writing so both parties have a clear record for their files.

HAZARDOUS CHEMICAL ON CELL PHONE INJURES MAINTENANCE TECHNICIAN’S EYES

- Of course, whether you are provided with a cell phone at work or permitted to use your own, always follow your organization’s guidelines, and your safety sense, to determine when it should be used.
- Maintenance technician Mike McCloud discusses how his cell phone became contaminated by a hazardous chemical that burned his eyes when he used it later.
- “I was in the waste treatment room, adding some chemicals to the process and doing a little cleaning up. Gary, my supervisor, was working on the other side of the plant and said he would text me what to do next,” says Mike.

- “I was almost finished when I heard my phone beep. I knew I wasn’t supposed to use the phone in areas containing chemicals, but I never understood why, so I went ahead and checked it,” he continues. “Gary wanted me to meet with him to look at some plans, so I replied that I was on the way.”
- Mike says he answered a call from another maintenance worker while he was on the way to meet Gary. When they started going over the plans, his eyes suddenly started burning and he couldn’t see. He had to get Gary to guide him to the eye wash station to flush his eyes.
- “Thank goodness Gary was there to help me to the eye wash station. As it turns out, I had gotten lime on my phone in the waste treatment area and then rubbed my eyes after using it later. Now I know why I wasn’t supposed to use it in the chemical area,” Mike says.
- “I’m just glad it happened to me and not one of my kids,” he notes. “You know, my six-year-old loves to play games on my phone. It could have been a lot worse.”
- Employees who work in areas containing hazardous substances already understand not to eat, drink or apply make-up in these areas due to the risk of contamination. They must now add not using their phone to this list of banned practices in hazardous areas.
- Keep in mind that this also includes areas near flammables as well as explosive atmospheres.

RECOGNIZING & RESPONDING TO UNSAFE CELL PHONE USE

- To avoid committing unsafe acts, we must make safety our top priority in every task we perform.
- We must adopt an attitude that our primary goal is doing every job as safely as possible. Maintaining this attitude will help us recognize situations where use of cell phones would not only interfere in our ability to perform our tasks without injury, but also hinder us from completing our jobs in a timely manner.
- We must be able to recognize and reject the excuses we often make for texting when we know it is unsafe or prohibited by policy.
- Finally, we must be willing to speak up when we see people putting themselves in harm’s way by texting while performing their job duties.
- It takes “two to text.” If you are on the receiving end of prohibited or unsafe texts being sent at work, don’t respond. Let them know, in person, that texting at work is unsafe and inappropriate and that you will not participate.
- Similar to other safety issues, putting a stop to dangerous texting or other distracting phone use requires a culture of speaking up and refusing to participate. When employees help to create this type of work environment, it creates a safer workplace for everyone.

CONCLUSION

- So what it all boils down to is this: our phones are powerful tools which allow us to have instant access to information and communication.
- When used appropriately, these devices can make our lives easier and more enjoyable, but when used at the wrong time and in the wrong manner, these same devices can get us in trouble at work and cause serious injury.
- It’s up to you to use your safety sense and your understanding of your organization’s rules and procedures to know the difference.

PREPARE FOR THE SAFETY MEETING

Review each section of this Leader's Guide as well as the DVD or digital media. Here are a few suggestions for using the program:

Make everyone aware of the importance the company places on health and safety and how each person must be an active member of the safety team.

Introduce the program and then play it without interruption. Review the program content by presenting the information in the program outline.

Here are some suggestions for preparing your video equipment and the room or area you use:

Check the room or area for quietness, adequate ventilation and temperature, lighting and unobstructed access.

Check the seating arrangement and the audiovisual equipment to ensure that all participants will be able to see and hear the program.

CONDUCTING THE PRESENTATION

Begin the meeting by welcoming the participants. Introduce yourself and give each person the opportunity to become acquainted if there are new people joining the training session.

Explain that the primary purpose of the program is to show employees how the use of cell phones can distract us from doing our jobs safely and efficiently and to stress the importance of following your organization's policy regarding cell phone use.

Introduce the program. Play it without interruption. Review the program content by presenting the information in the program outline.

Lead discussions about your company's rules regarding cell phone use, including specific job tasks and work areas in which usage is restricted.

After watching the program, the viewer will be able to explain the following:

- How workplace cell phone use can distract us and cause us to lose focus on doing our jobs safely;
- How using cell phones at work adversely affects our production level;
- What types of communication are inappropriate for company-owned cell phone use;
- Why use of cell phones is prohibited in areas containing hazardous substances;
- Why we must be able to recognize and reject our excuses for texting when it is unsafe or prohibited;
- Why we must be willing to speak up and refuse to participate in dangerous texting or distracted phone use.

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A Dangerous Distraction
REVIEW QUIZ

Name _____ Date _____

The following questions are provided to check how well you understand the information presented during this program.

1. Sending and receiving text messages at work can be just as dangerous as texting while driving.
 - a. true
 - b. false

2. Employees who don't perform hazardous jobs cannot be disciplined for texting at work.
 - a. true
 - b. false

3. If cell phone use is prohibited at your workplace, hiding in closets and frequently visiting restrooms to send and receive texts is still a violation of company policy for which you may be punished.
 - a. true
 - b. false

4. Why did Iris think it was okay to take her phone into the production area?
 - a. she was expecting an important call
 - b. her supervisor told her it was all right
 - c. everybody did it

5. The messages you send and receive on a company owned cell phone are considered _____ property.
 - a. personal
 - b. company

6. Such things as pay, medical issues and absences should not be discussed with supervisors by text message.
 - a. true
 - b. false

7. What did Mike get in his eyes after using his phone in the waste treatment area?
 - a. sulfur
 - b. lime
 - c. silicon

8. What should you do if you are on the receiving end of a prohibited or unsafe text at work?
 - a. text the person back and tell him or her that you aren't supposed to text at work
 - b. call the person on your cell phone and inform him or her that you aren't allowed to text at work
 - c. let him or her know in person that texting at work is unsafe and inappropriate and you will not participate

ANSWERS TO THE REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. a

2. b

3. a

4. c

5. b

6. a

7. b

8. c