KEEPING YOUR EMPLOYEES AUTOMATICALLY SAFE

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Have you ever driven down the interstate and suddenly realized you are three or four miles further along than you thought? Did you ever pass by your exit and not realize it until after you passed by it? Ever sit in a meeting that you thought boring and your mind drifts off to other subjects? I think all of us have experienced one or more of the above at one time or other. I know I certainly have, in fact, it is estimated that 25% of the people on the road at one time has their mind someplace else. As scary as that sounds it is a fact of life.

Our minds are very active. We are always thinking about something and many times we have more than one thing we are thinking about. Because of this, we have developed the unique capability of doing one thing while thinking of something else. I call this Automatic Pilot. Our minds are always seeking out the most important, exciting or pleasurable topics. It is hard if not impossible to control this tendency. Our minds do not want to be bored or forced to think of the same thing all of the time over and over.

When I first started into safety, I was often concerned when doing an accident investigation, that many employees could not remember what they were thinking about right before the accident. After all, most accidents do not happen by accident and I was convinced that most employees should be able to tell me what happened, how it happened and why it happened. I soon came to realize that many times accidents take place when we are not concentrating on the task at hand. We could do the same task over and over and nothing out of the ordinary would happen. In fact, nothing out of the ordinary should happen.

The above assumption is based on everything working together correctly including the employee working safely. Unfortunately, the latter is not always the case. If employees do not develop safe work habits that are reinforced everyday, they may be putting themselves at risk. Once these habits are developed employees will do them without even thinking about it. In other words <u>Automatically</u>. This behavior will continue uninterrupted unless corrected or the employee has an accident. Many times unsafe behavior is so common that supervisors do not even realize it is taking place.

Although, I do not have a magic pill to eliminate Automatic Pilot, I do know that safe work behavior is critical all of the time. Employees have to be taught safe work practices and they need to incorporate these into their everyday work behavior. It has to become so ingrained that employees will not deviate from safe work practices. This is the only way to prevent employee accidents and protect them when they are in Automatic Pilot. If employees are left on their own unsafe work behavior often develops.

All supervisors need to be aware of what constitutes safe work behavior. <u>Safe Operating Procedures</u> should be developed. Employee Training should be conducted in these procedures. Supervisors should follow-up on a regular basis until safe behavior is an automatic part of every employee's behavior. Counseling should be conducted where necessary to correct behavior and close follow-up should be maintained.

Safe work behavior needs to become automatic. This takes practice over and over again until it becomes second nature. Employees should be able to do it safely in their sleep. Afterall, we never know when it will be the difference between a serious accident taking place and just another dull boring routine day to day part of the job. Accidents happen so fast that even the best of us do not have time to react. This is impossible if we are mentally someplace else at the time. The only way to avoid this possibility is not to let ourselves get into the position where we put ourselves at risk. Safety needs to be something we do 100% of the time all of the time. We owe it to our employees and we owe it to ourselves.

If you have any questions about safety or would be interested in talking to me about your Safety Program, please feel free to call me at 1-800-356-1274.