

Situational Awareness

WHY THIS MATTERS

Lack of situational awareness is a leading factor in workplace injuries and fatalities. Three of OSHA's Fatal Four — falls, struck-by, and caught-in/between — are directly related to workers not recognizing hazards around them. Staying alert saves lives.

60%

Of construction deaths from Fatal Four (OSHA)

5,070

Total workplace fatalities in 2024 (BLS)

2.4

Injuries per 100 workers in 2023 (BLS)

5 Rules for Situational Awareness

Every worker must practice these habits to stay safe on the job:

1

SCAN YOUR SURROUNDINGS

Before starting any task, do a 360-degree visual scan. Look up, down, and around for overhead loads, moving equipment, floor openings, and changing conditions.

2

IDENTIFY HAZARDS FIRST

Perform a mental risk assessment before each task. Ask: What can go wrong? What can fall, move, or strike me? What has changed since yesterday?

3

COMMUNICATE CONSTANTLY

Use clear verbal signals, hand signals, or radios. Alert coworkers when moving loads, backing equipment, or working in shared spaces. Never assume others see you.

4

ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS

Put away phones, remove earbuds, and stay focused. Distracted workers miss warning signs, alarms, and equipment movements that can be fatal.

5

PLAN ESCAPE ROUTES

Always know your way out. Identify exits, muster points, and safe zones. If conditions change — wind, rain, new equipment — reassess your position immediately.

Before You Start — Quick Checklist

- Have you done a 360-degree scan of your work area?
- Are all overhead and nearby hazards identified?
- Do you know where moving equipment is operating?
- Are your escape routes and muster points clear?
- Have changing conditions been communicated to all?
- Are you free of distractions (phone, earbuds, fatigue)?

The 6 Awareness Zones — Check Every Time

Above: Look up for overhead loads, cranes, falling tools, unstable materials on scaffolds, and power lines.

Below: Check for floor openings, holes, trenches, uneven surfaces, and slippery conditions.

Behind: Be aware of reversing vehicles, swinging loads, and coworkers operating equipment behind you.

Beside: Watch for pinch points, rotating machinery, and workers in adjacent areas with conflicting tasks.

Ahead: Scan your walking path for obstacles, protruding rebar, low-hanging structures, and wet surfaces.

Within: Monitor yourself — fatigue, stress, dehydration, and complacency are invisible hazards that kill.

Common Mistakes That Kill

- ✗ Walking through active work zones while looking at a phone or paperwork
- ✗ Assuming equipment operators can see you — always make eye contact first
- ✗ Not reassessing hazards when conditions change (weather, new tasks, crew rotation)
- ✗ Working on autopilot — complacency from routine tasks leads to missed hazards
- ✗ Failing to communicate your position when working near moving equipment

Safety Tips to Remember

- ✓ Do a fresh hazard scan every time you return to your work area — things change
- ✓ Use the 'two-second rule' — pause and look before stepping into any new zone
- ✓ Wear high-visibility clothing so equipment operators and coworkers can see you
- ✓ Report near-misses immediately — they are warnings of the next serious incident
- ✓ Stay hydrated and rested — fatigue is the #1 enemy of situational awareness

Discussion Questions for Your Team

1. What hazards exist in our current work area right now?
2. Has anyone had a near-miss recently that was caused by lack of awareness?
3. What distractions are most common on our site?
4. How do we communicate when conditions change during the day?
5. Do we know our escape routes and muster points?

TOOLBOX TALK SIGN-OFF

Date: _____

Supervisor: _____

Project: _____

Location: _____

Attendance sheet attached: [] Yes