



Orientation: Safety Begins On Day One

The first few days on a new job are critical to a new employee's safety. During this phase, each worker develops the knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities necessary to work safely and successfully. This is why organizing an effective orientation program is vital to accident prevention – particularly when a worker begins a new job or returns to work after an extended absence. Employers should pay special attention to workers who transfer to new jobs or work in unfamiliar areas, are returning from an extended period away from work, or are new to the workforce.

A company representative should speak with the new employee about performing the job safely before the new employee begins work. Orientation and training should include safe work practices as well as procedures for reporting unsafe conditions. Orientation should be followed by specific onsite training in the operational techniques and safe work practices of the job.

Boring orientations can lead to wandering minds and poor information retention. In his book, "Basics of Safety and Health," Neville C. Tompkins offers several recommendations to help keep an employee's attention:

- The room's atmosphere should be relaxed and informal. Include refreshments to set a positive, friendly tone.
- The business objectives of the orientation should be clearly outlined at the beginning.
- Several employees should be oriented at once so participants can learn from each other.
- In today's diverse, multilingual workforce, job orientation in languages other than English may be necessary.

Organizing an Orientation

When planning an orientation, avoid information overload. Forget about covering everything at once. Consider spreading your orientation out over several days, a week or even longer. Effective training programs:

- Begin with behavior objectives.
- Build on adult learning principles.
- Appeal to many learning styles.
- Appeal to people from diverse cultures and experiences.
- Make learning memorable and experiential.
- Promote teamwork.
- Use instructional design principles and phased development.
- Use appropriate media.

Develop a formal safety orientation checklist. Begin with a human resources overview of safety policies, providing the employee with a written copy. A supervisor should handle more specific training, including a written job safety analysis. Conduct follow-up refresher training a few weeks after orientation.

Take into consideration that adult learning needs are a major factor in the success of any training. Adult learning principles must be used in the design and delivery of training. For example, one adult learning principle is based on the belief that each person learns best through one of three senses:



Hearing – 11 percent of humans are auditory learners.
Sight – 83 percent of humans are visual learners.
Touch – 69 percent of humans are kinesthetic learners.

Some organizations use interactive computer-based training to provide much of their basic orientation. This type of orientation allows new workers to proceed at their own pace and prevents advancement to more complex procedures until the earlier information has been mastered. Such training also automatically records which workers have completed the training, and their acknowledgment that they have read and understood company and department work rules.

Workers who had a good learning experience are more likely to hold onto the information they need and apply it to their daily work.

Providing Information

Begin the training orientation by providing general health and safety information. Provide workers with information such as workplace hazards and regulatory requirements, including workers' rights and responsibilities.

During the first week, train the worker about health and safety matters affecting his or her job, including how to handle tools, equipment and machinery. Answer any questions, and ensure the worker understands critical information.

When the worker is ready, begin workplace-specific training. Consider asking a reliable, safety-conscious employee to be the new worker's "safety buddy" in case he or she has questions. Having someone close to him or her on the job will not only help build peer relationships but may help the inexperienced worker pick up safety-conscious attitudes and work practices.

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