Listen for Danger

Introduction:

Many worksites have a variety of sounds from the operation of equipment and machines. Workers should be able to distinguish between "normal" sounds of noise and sounds of danger. According to OSHA, there are over two million workers injured each year in the United States because workers fail to identify sounds of hazard. Workers should become acquainted with the sounds of equipment and machines operating in the work area.

Discussion Points:

- Become acquainted with sounds of equipment and machines operating in the work area
- Be able to identify sounds of hazard
- Be aware of warning signals and alarms
- Do not ignore sounds of hazard or warning signals
- Use a Warning Signal Checklist to protect employees from serious injury

Discussion:

What is the sound of equipment and machines used in your work area? What is the sound level of noise? Are you able to hear co-workers or supervisors speak to you? Are you able to hear and understand different warning signals? Do you know what actions to take when you hear a warning signal? These are a few questions that every worker should be able to answer. Your safety could depend on your ability to identify unusual sounds, sounds of danger, and the ability to communicate with co-workers or a supervisor. The sounds you hear can be the result of equipment, tools, machines, and vehicles used by workers, or warning signals, announcements over the PA system, people talking, or sounds of inclement weather.

Employees must become familiar with how the workplace is supposed to sound. They should be able to identify "normal" sounds and detect changes in tone and pitch. It's important for them to be aware of warning signals and not be distracted or become nonchalant when signals are ignored. Workers should be able to hear warning signals and verbal directions from co-workers and supervisors. Training must include what actions to take when they hear the signals. All too often, workers do not understand the meaning of warning signals or how to react. It is recommended that the company have a safety policy that includes a Warning Signal Checklist. This checklist should address hazards, assessments, training, guidelines, and instructions for employees and visitors. The instructions should include the meaning of warning signals, and descriptions of actions to be taken. The company should have a well-developed emergency response plan and safety policy, a Warning Signal Checklist, and regularly-scheduled training sessions. It's vital that the company protect its employees from unnecessary risks, potential hazards, and serious injuries.

As always, stay safe out there!

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