



Learn How to See Those 'Unseen' Hazards



Have you ever found yourself reading an incident report concerning an injury to a worker or damage to equipment and wondered “how in the world did that happen?” More than likely it happened because someone didn’t recognize a hazard. Hazards are the source of personal injuries and damage to vehicles, equipment, and property. Hazards abound at home, work and play. The problem: we don’t see them until they hurt us. It’s no joke when someone says “I didn’t see it coming!” Recognizing a hazard requires a trained brain that quickly analyzes the risk and the consequences posed by the situation. It’s not unusual to find that a worker involved in an incident/accident was trained to control hazards associated with his or her work, but had not been specifically trained to see the hazards.

“Continuing to cling to what you know inhibits you from discovering what you don’t know.”

-Eric Allenbaugh

This is all a part of the gap between knowing and doing: people know what to do when they recognize the hazard, they just don’t see it. Hazard control is the key to preventing injuries and damage, yet to control the hazard, employees at all levels must be trained to recognize them. When you consider this, you’ll start to see the problem in many places. Without the ability to see hazards, people will put themselves in positions that can lead to personal or co-worker injury or damaged equipment.



Train Yourself to See: We humans often think that we are above reproach and know that we have been well trained. Sometimes that can turn into pride and that will get us into trouble. So many times we face unknown or unseen hazards in the workplace. One of the first things you can do is to consider your overall perception of safety. Do you consider that you can have little influence over what happens – that external forces are the primary cause of injuries? Or do you have an internal focus that lets you know that you have a great deal of control over the environment or situation? The degree to which you perceive that you have control over the consequences of a situation is known as the locus of control or LOC.

People generally have a strong internal or external safety LOC. One of the first things you can do to train yourself to see hazards is to consider your LOC. If you have a strong external LOC, you are likely to think you have little control and therefore may not look for or consider the hazards.

This calls for some deep introspection. Think about the times that you've been able to avoid injury by wearing your personal protective equipment or by following a procedure. You can even look back on incidents that occurred because you, or someone else, didn't follow safe work practices. Challenge yourself to look for the things that you can control. If you have a strong internal LOC, you may go too far in thinking that you personally can control hazards, and may not use all of the tools and technology at your disposal. It's simply a good idea – you'll be surprised how much better you 'see' hazards with this personal insight.

Train yourself to recognize hazards and learn everything you can about controlling various hazards.

Five Steps to See the Unseen Hazards:

It's important to recognize that we all have trouble seeing hazards sometimes, yet there are several things you can do to improve your *hazard vision*:

1. Recognize your own perception of your ability to control hazards.
2. Discuss and list the typical hazards associated with your industry or your job.
3. Work with more experienced people from time to time and ask them what hazards they see – then determine if you see the same ones.
4. Take another look around a new work site with the intent of finding hazards that you missed the first time.
5. Read incident reports or investigation reports from others to continuously learn about new hazards.

Perhaps the most important thing you can do to train yourself to recognize hazards is to learn everything you can about controlling various hazards. From that perspective, you'll discover information that you can apply to keep yourself and others injury-free at work and at home.

Ref: Carl Potter, CSP and Deb Potter, PhD;

Improve Your Vision: Five Tips to Improve your Ability to See Hazards

