



## Complacency

### Introduction

While driving, we make decisions, almost every second and we aren't even aware of many of them. Have you ever suddenly realized while driving that you hadn't looked at the road recently? Have you ever stepped off a curb into a crosswalk without looking for traffic? Have you ever entered a tank without being cognizant of the potential dangers or moved at heights without noticing your height? These behaviors are examples of complacency. In this Toolbox Talk, complacency at work is discussed as well as some tips to avoid it.

### What is complacency and what are the factors inducing it?

When individuals perform the same task repetitively and without incident, they begin to ignore or diminish the hazards of the task; this is the simple definition of complacency. A more detailed explanation is a sense of contentment or self-satisfaction, combined with a decreased sense of risk and reduced anticipation of possible problems. Several factors can contribute to complacency in the workplace. Listed below are some of those factors.

#### External factors

- Good system safety performance – thinking that accidents just don't happen and the machines seem to take care of themselves
- Lack of oversight – management seems not to care, and shows little or no proactive leadership resulting in a lack of intervention to consequences of complacency
- Unchallenging work where job tasks are mundane and repetitive
- The lack of incident identification, analysis and reporting to workers
- Intermittent rather than on-going safety training and safety emphasis

#### Internal factors

- Risk perception errors – making assumptions about the inherent safety of job performance
- A lack of consequence thinking – not thinking about “What could go wrong?”
- Not taking time to assess a job situation
- Tunnel vision – occurs when employees see situations narrowly, without considering risks outside the tasks at hand

#### Actual Near Miss

While a crew member was performing line handling operations, he stepped over a line under tension. This act is unsafe and against company procedures; the crew member was aware of the procedure but had become complacent due to the repetitiveness of the task. (*Critical behavior: Line of Fire*)

#### The effects of complacency

When people are complacent they may perform actions that could lead to increased errors, leading to incidents. Some of these actions are listed below.

- Taking shortcuts or omitting steps
- Rushing to the completion of the task
- Assuming that everything will go perfectly and as expected
- Assuming others are concerned with the safety aspects of the task they are performing
- Taking risks, underestimating risk, or omitting risk consideration
- Inattention while performing tasks (performing tasks on 'autopilot')
- Performing a task without following established procedures or without using the required equipment



## Tips to avoid complacency

It's human nature to become complacent while performing tasks we are thoroughly familiar with. In order to combat against this, the following tips may be helpful.

- Perform a simple risk assessment prior to beginning a task, asking the following questions
  - Why is this task being performed?
  - What could go wrong (consequence thinking)?
  - What is the chance of that happening?
  - What effects can this have on personnel in the area?
  - What can be done to prevent something from going wrong?
- Follow all policies and procedures
- Train continually and review the task often
- Create mental challenges to help remain attentive to the task
- Maintain a questioning attitude
- Maintain awareness of your surroundings and the task at hand
- Avoid making assumptions about the status of the task or the system
- Avoid feeling that your years of experience mean that you can perform the job without errors.

## Actual Injury Report

An employee was cleaning a sieve of the engine room bilge strainer with a wire brush when he allowed his finger to make contact with the sieve, resulting in a severe cut. The injured party was clearly complacent about the task, and did not maintain awareness of the proximity of his finger to the sieve. He was also complacent about wearing gloves while doing this task. Lastly, if he did any kind of on-the-fly risk analysis, he also did it with some degree of complacency (Critical behavior: Line of fire).

## Discussion

- Complacency is very hard to overcome as an individual
- A good remedy for complacency is constantly reminding yourself about safety in the workplace: there should be continuous safety reminders put in place throughout the organization. Constant reminders about safety will remind us to be vigilant, and to not be complacent
- Near miss and incident analysis and reporting are important too. The workforce needs to be informed of injuries and near misses, and reminded that accidents can happen to any of us
- Report and discuss any incidents concerning complacency with your supervisor



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