

Dealing with Workplace Distractions

In many work situations, distractions and interruptions are unavoidable. Some distractions can even lead to workplace injuries. However, many of these incidences can be controlled or prevented. Regardless of the distraction, your first priority should be to keep your mind and your focus on your safety and the safety of others, and then focus on the task at hand.

Workplace distractions can result in work errors or accidents. Before addressing or responding to another person, workers should disengage or shutdown any work tool, equipment, or process that requires their attention. On-the-job training should include instructions to not interrupt others during a critical job phase or process. Instruction manuals and procedural guidebooks should be kept on site to answer frequently asked questions, or a supervisor should be consulted, and thereby eliminate the need to interrupt or distract other workers.

External noises from tools, mobile equipment, and processes can be distracting in industrial and construction work environments. In work situations where loud or constant noise is unavoidable, hearing protection devices can decrease or eliminate unwanted and distracting noise. In other work environments, even not-so-loud sounds can be distracting. Constantly ringing phones, conversations, and loud faxes, copiers and printers can distract workers from their job tasks.

Portable electronic devices can be the source of distractions in some work environments. If these devices are approved in your workplace, make sure you keep them on a low volume or silent as a courtesy to your coworkers. To maximize work safety and performance, turn email notifications off and disable instant messaging. If possible, avoid answering the phone or emails when you're in the middle of a task.

Wearing headphones on a construction or industrial site can be dangerous if it prevents workers from hearing warning signals such as mobile equipment backup alarms, and safety instructions. Headphone use also has the potential to interfere with communication, and worker focus. Talking on the phone while walking around can also be a distraction and can result in injury.

Notify your supervisor about repeated and/or unsafe distractions. Some workplace distractions and interruptions are unavoidable, but others, if not properly controlled or regulated, have the potential to cause serious injury.