

Take 5 for Safety

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a passion for discovery



Questioning Attitude — At The Activity Level

- A questioning attitude fosters thought about safety before action is taken
- A healthy questioning attitude will overcome the temptation to rationalize away “gut feelings” that something is not right
- A questioning attitude promotes a preference for facts over assumptions and opinion
- Questions such as “What if . . .?” or “Why is this acceptable?” help improve recognition of improper assumptions and possible mistakes
- Facts, not assumptions, reveal more knowledge about the situation and eliminate doubt
- Facts depend on the reliability of the information source and the accuracy of that information
- Without sufficient facts, a worker should stop the activity to address an unpredictable work situation that could lead to a serious mistake or significant event

Flags to Start a Questioning Attitude

- During self-checking
- Before performing an important step or phase of an activity
- When making a decision about an important activity
- When experiencing uncertainty, confusion, or doubt
- When experiencing a “gut feeling” that something is not right
- When encountering unanticipated changes in conditions
- When conflicts or inconsistencies exist between plans, procedures, and actual conditions
- After encountering unexpected results
- After discovering missing information or resources
- Upon hearing certain words: “I assume,” “probably,” “I think,” “maybe,” “should be,” “not sure,” “might,” and “we've always done it this way”

Recommended Approach

- **Pause when a flag is recognized**
- **Ask questions and gather relevant information**
 - **What are the “knowns” and “unknowns”?**
 - **Use reliable information sources; ask knowledgeable persons**
 - **Seek independent sources of information or independent verification**
 - **Consider “what if...?” or use a “devil's advocate” approach in a spirit of helpfulness**
 - **Identify persistent inconsistencies and uncertainties**
- **Proceed if sure – Continue the activity if uncertainty has been resolved with facts**
- **Stop when unsure – If inconsistencies, confusion, uncertainties, or doubts still exist**
 - **Stop the activity**
 - **If applicable, place equipment and the job site in a safe condition**
 - **Notify your immediate supervisor**

Avoid These At-Risk Practices

- Not pausing periodically to refresh your understanding of a work situation
- Proceeding with a task when questions exist
- Being unaware of critical parameters or margins
- Believing nothing can go wrong
- Believing that repetitive means “routine” or “simple” and carries “no risk”
- Rationalizing or ignoring doubts, uncertainties, contradictory information, subtle differences, or anomalies
- Not asking questions when subtle cues suggest disorientation is occurring
- Accepting the first thing that comes to mind as factual
- Not understanding the basis of a procedure step or a hazard control

