

Safety Tips

June is National Safety Month

It's a fitting time for the National Safety Council to unveil a new brand and mission statement.

We remain committed to creating a culture of safety in every workplace across the country. But in today's unprecedented times, it's more important than ever for NSC to help **save lives, from the workplace to anyplace**. We aim to make people safer at work – and beyond – through our focus on three strategic pillars: Workplace, Roadway and Impairment.

This month, NSC shines a light on four pressing workplace issues: driving, ergonomics, building a safety culture and mental health.



A safe drive

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of workplace death. Preliminary estimates released in May by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration show a 1.2% decrease in motor vehicle-related deaths in 2019 from the previous year.

"While we are heading in the right direction, more work needs to be done to ensure safety on our roadways," NSC says.

Keep it safe every time you get behind the wheel by following these best practices from NSC:

- Adjust your mirrors to limit your blind spots.
- Program your GPS before you leave.
- Set your cellphone to "Do Not Disturb" and put it and any other distracting devices or items away.
- Adjust your seat so you can reach any knobs and switches.
- Have an emergency kit stocked and stored in your vehicle. Inspect it before setting off.
- Make sure you're in the right head space to drive – free of impairment, distraction and frustration.
- Obey all traffic signs and posted speed limits.
- Use your signals and lights when driving.
- Give pedestrians the right of way.
- Don't drive if you're tired. Try to take a nap before getting behind the wheel.
- Drive slowly and cautiously in parking lots and garages.
- Check the potential side effects of your medications before getting behind the wheel.
- Stop for breaks on long driving trips.
- Buckle up.
- Leave yourself enough time to safely reach your destination.

"Any drop in motor vehicle deaths should be well received, but the ultimate goal we need to reach is zero," NSC says.

Keep your workday free of ergo issues

"Our bodies are very good at giving us warning signs when something needs to change," NSC says. "We just need to be willing to listen and take action."

Here are some tips on working ergonomically:

- Work in a neutral posture.
- Avoid exerting a lot of force while working.
- Vary your tasks.
- Lift with your legs – never your back.
- Reduce stressful movements.
- Keep frequently used items close to avoid twisting or turning often.
- Use the right tools and setup for the job.
- Make sure work areas are well lit.
- Get proper rest and take breaks.
- Assume a relaxed, tension-free posture in your neck and shoulders.
- Place your elbows at a 90-degree angle.
- Keep your wrists in a neutral position, protected from sharp or hard edges.
- Make sure the mouse is at the same height and distance from the screen as the keyboard.
- Ensure you have adequate lower-back support.
- Keep your knees and hips at a 90-degree angles.
- Position your feet flat on the floor or support them with a footrest.
- Make sure the height of your work surface is appropriate.
- Sit the correct distance from the monitor – about 25 inches.
- Make sure you can easily read the text on your screen.

And don't forget to stretch! Regular stretching gives your body the necessary breaks it needs throughout the day. Consider group stretch breaks with your co-workers – even if your colleagues are virtual right now – especially during extended projects or meetings.

Save lives, from the workplace to anyplace.™

Build a strong culture: Tips for 'talking safety'

No one can keep an entire organization safe on his or her own. Collaboration is needed to create a strong safety culture in which everyone looks out for each other.

There's no magic formula to make someone heed safety advice. But improving the atmosphere around safety conversations can make it easier to give and receive advice in a graceful, constructive way. Here are some ways you can do that:

Retire the 'safety police.' The "gotcha" approach is counterproductive, experts say. When workers feel they're being policed, they find ways to hide their unsafe behaviors, resulting in lost opportunities for improvement. To make a genuine, long-term impact, take a persuasive approach rather than a punitive one.

Speak the worker's language. Instead of presenting the information in the way that makes the most sense to the speaker, consider how the worker will receive it. Before saying anything, take a moment to think about who is being spoken to and what he or she cares about, and tailor the conversation to speak to those motivations. And remember: Good communication goes both ways. Instead of doing all the talking, listen to what workers have to say – especially any questions or objections they bring up, which can reveal their motivations.

Demonstrate care and concern. By far, the greatest reason to give a worker for adopting a safe behavior is concern for his or her well-being, and the best way to avoid the appearance of lecturing is to show concern for that person. Be calm and keep emotions in check to help send the right message.

Focus on specifics. To avoid expressing judgment or disapproval and provoking a defensive reaction, limit comments to the precise unsafe behaviors or conditions that were witnessed.

Get (and give) permission. If you're concerned that well-intentioned advice will come off as intrusive, it may help to set the stage for the safety conversation beforehand.

Lead by example and encourage others to do the same. Workers tend to do what those around them are doing, so it's essential to demonstrate safe behaviors in addition to talking about them.

Focus on mental health

Workers might be facing a number of issues during the COVID-19 crisis that can have an impact on mental health, including furloughs and layoffs, social isolation, financial hardships and worries, and health concerns for themselves and their families.

"I've heard it said that the next pandemic wave may be mental health," said Marissa J. Levine, a professor at the University of South Florida, during an April 14 webinar on mental health hosted by NSC. "Honestly, I'm concerned about that. It's affected every state, every one of us, in some way."

Employees might be getting information from numerous, and sometimes unreliable, sources at this time. "It's very difficult, in these anxious times, to catch peoples' attention," Eric Goplerud, chair of the board of directors for the Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions, said during the webinar. "There are 11 words which will help you communicate and break through the anxiety: A simple message, repeated often, from a variety of trusted sources."

Levine recommended employers and managers follow and share coping strategies from sources such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness, which suggests taking breaks from consuming news reports related to the pandemic, taking time to unwind, working on physical fitness and social connections, setting goals and priorities, and focusing on the facts.

For employers, human resources teams and safety leaders, Goplerud encouraged more communication about benefits programs, such as an employee assistance program. Leaders also should encourage more interaction with benefits vendors.

Employers and managers can share honest updates about COVID-19 while also providing a positive outlook for the path forward.

"There's a real opportunity here for focusing on the positives without minimizing the issues that we're dealing with," Levine said. "Having a can-do attitude and the power of positive thinking are needed now more than ever."

For more information on National Safety Month or to find more resources, go to nsc.org/nsm.