

## Eliminate Electronic Distractions From the Workplace

It is a generally accepted fact that the use of cellphones and other electronic devices while driving present a distraction that greatly increases the chance for an accident. Unfortunately, what too many people fail to take into consideration is how distracting these devices can be in other situations.

In an industry of moving machinery and equipment, manufacturing workers are especially susceptible to workplace injury. They need to be alert at all times, as even the smallest slip-up can cause an accident. Not only can an inattentive worker injure themselves but their carelessness can also endanger others. In this type of work environment it is easy to see the importance of minimizing the potential distractions faced by your employees.

### Cellphones

Whether it's talking or texting, cellphone use takes the employees focus off their task. While handheld use compounds the problem, even using a hands-free device does not allow for full concentration. Studies indicate that the act of talking on the phone is distracting regardless of whether the user is physically holding the device or not. It is the conversation itself that takes an employee's focus off their work and surroundings.

While some employees may need to use a work cellphone as part of their job, it is best to place restrictions on when and where those phones can be used. Personal cellphones should not be allowed on the manufacturing floor at all, as even the momentary distraction of a call or message alert can potentially lead to an accident. Employees should not have phones on their person during work hours unless they are on a break from their duties and are in a designated break area.

**Attentive, focused employees are essential to creating a safe work environment. To reduce the chance for employee injury, it is important to keep the workplace free of distractions, such as cellphones and mp3 players.**

### Mp3 and Other Music Players

There are a variety of audio cues that alert workers to what is happening around them. Unfortunately, when an employee's hearing is impaired by music, a shout from a coworker, an odd sound from a malfunctioning machine or the backup alarm on a truck or forklift can be easily missed. Besides limiting the worker's ability to hear what is going on around them, there is also the potential distraction of operating the device. When adjusting volume or switching songs, not only is the employee's hearing impaired, but they are also visually engaged with the device. This greatly decreases the worker's awareness of his or her surroundings.

## Potential Hearing Loss

In a manufacturing setting it is not uncommon for there to be high noise levels that require proper ear protection to prevent hearing loss. The use of cellphones, hands-free devices and headphones can interfere with an employee's proper use of protective equipment. Even though such devices may cover the ear, most are not meant to provide hearing protection.

In fact, in noisy situations, devices that administer sound directly into the ear increase dangerous levels of noise exposure as employees turn up volume levels to drown out background noise. The combination of these noise exposures greatly increases the rate of hearing loss, which in turn increases the chance for occupational hearing loss claims.

## Electronics Usage Policy

Attentive, focused employees are essential to creating a safe work environment, which is why it is important to eliminate possible distractions. Prohibiting employee use of personal electronic devices can aid in reducing workplace accidents. To clearly state your company's rules on when and where usage is restricted, institute an electronics usage policy. Once instituted, train your employees in the policy requirements and make sure restrictions are diligently enforced.

**To learn more, contact the Property & Casualty experts at Hierl today.**