

MIOSHA Fact Sheet

Situational Awareness



Workers must navigate through a vast array of hazards. Amidst all the workers, equipment, and materials, lies a lurking danger: the risk of being struck by, crushed by, or caught in between. A simple way to understand this is to know that when somebody is in the wrong place at the wrong time, they have placed themselves in the zone of danger and lack situational awareness.

Zone of danger hazards are taking a high toll on Michigan workers. In 2023, there were 24 fatalities due to zone of danger accidents. There are an infinite number of scenarios that can happen when we put ourselves in the zone of danger: something could fall, a rope or chain under tension can snap and strike someone or something, heavy equipment can suddenly move, or a vehicle could fail to stop when expected.

Temporary loss or lack of situational awareness is an identified cause of many accidents. Often there is so much activity in a work environment, or workers become absorbed in their own thoughts, that they fail to spot things that could pose a serious threat to health and safety. In these situations, it is essential to maintain a high level of situational awareness to stop accidents and near misses.

Tips to Prevent Zone of Danger Incidents and Improve Situational Awareness

- Train workers to recognize and avoid hazards continually and never to rush through tasks.
- Plan work. Think about what could go wrong and if anyone will be in harm's way. This should be a habit before starting each task performed.
- Instruct workers to look in every direction for objects that could strike or crush them.
- Do not get between a rock and a hard place. Keep all parts of workers' bodies out of places where something moving could crush them against something else. For example, never stand between a moving vehicle and a wall.
- If working near a roadway, never turn your back on traffic and always have an escape path. Keep all vehicles well off the edge of the road and use traffic control plans to warn drivers of the hazards the task may be creating.
- Never walk into the radius of moving equipment without making eye contact with the equipment's operator and receiving clear indication that they are aware of your presence.
- Manage the job sites to separate workers from heavy equipment and minimize congestion.
- Perform daily briefings and job safety analysis (JSA) to help remind workers to be aware and vigilant.
- Enforce strict safety policies and provide clear communication to reduce the chaos and improve safety overall.
- Watch workers for mental and physical fatigue, which can lead to complacency.
- Avoid distractions while working high hazard jobs.

MIOSHA's Consultation Education and Training (CET) Division can provide and assist with more information on situational awareness as well as safety and health training. You may contact the CET Division at 517-284-7720 or online at www.michigan.gov/cet. CET may also be available to employee groups and other organizations. Call to request help.

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