

It may seem counterintuitive, but it is possible to go too far when seeking to provide the proper safety devices for your employees. Use common sense, and don't rely on a "blanket policy" when determining need.

Is it possible to have too much safety in our workplaces? The right question might be, Is it even reasonable to consider such a thought? Of course not, if your definition is the same one that most of us understand. However, there are a couple of circumstances that may cause some of us to rethink some aspects of our safety programs. One of these would involve the "bean counters" who keep track of the costs of the equipment, training, paperwork, and lost production time involved in creating and maintaining a comprehensive safety program. We have discussed the arguments for and against these attempts to cut back on our safety programs. However, there is another issue that may indicate that we are sometimes too aggressive in our pursuit of providing safety for our employees. The issue that I am talking about is overprotection.

How can you be overprotected? An example would be that, in our zeal to protect our employees' hearing, we specify hearing protection for everyone that exceeds the requirement of the many to protect the few. In this case we are actually doing more harm than good. We may have a few workers who must be in an environment where the decibel level exceeds the standard for safe work, and we therefore mandate hearing protection of a style that may be good for those few, but actually makes the majority of our workers unable to hear warnings, calls for help, or the unusual noises from their machines that indicate a serious problem.


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Providing proper hearing protection is a vital and necessary goal for all of us, but it must be considered and utilized on a case-by-case basis. Investing in a good decibel monitor so that each individual workstation can be monitored for the proper level of hearing protection can be one of the better investments that you can make. It will allow for distribution of the proper level of hearing protection for each employee without endangering any of your other workers. It will also eliminate the overprotection problem.

Another area that can be reviewed for overprotection is footwear and eye protection, which have both been discussed in recent columns. Again, these are areas that can lead to overprotection to the detriment of some of the workers. All in all, safety cannot be overdone, but we sometimes provide the same level of pro-

tection to everyone in the company, rather than determining the level of need each employee requires and can benefit from, and that in itself can have the opposite effect than the one we're striving for.

In other matters, an area of safety in our shops that we have not visited lately is heavy lifting. As we are all aware, gear blanks, tooling, and even hobs these days can exceed the weights that an individual can comfortably lift. What are you doing to help your employees with these weights? Do you have waist-high tables at the workstation so that the heavier parts can be lifted safely, or are the employees expected to lift from the floor or a skid or pan? Do you have chain lifts to help with the heaviest parts? What about lifting supports for your employee's backs? Sometimes just the simplest thing—such as a buddy system or the proper placement of the table that the material has to be lifted from—can really help in terms of the safety and comfort of your employees, not to mention their continued productivity. This especially applies to all "vertically challenged" people, for which something so simple as a sturdy stepstool might make all the difference in the world.

There are just so many inexpensive little ways to make the job more safe and comfortable that we all tend to overlook. It seems to be our very nature to look for a complicated answer when there are usually very uncomplicated methods that could be applied. 

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