

WHAT'S YOUR EXCUSE?

This easy-to-use Leader's Guide is provided to assist in conducting a successful presentation. Featured are:

INTRODUCTION: A brief description of the program and the subject that it addresses.

PROGRAM OUTLINE: Summarizes the program content. If the program outline is discussed before the video is presented, the entire program will be more meaningful and successful.

PREPARING FOR AND CONDUCTING THE PRESENTATION: These sections will help you set up the training environment, help you relate the program to site-specific incidents, and provide program objectives for focusing your presentation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Questions may be copied and given to participants to stimulate discussion about the program, its safety lessons and universal theme.

INTRODUCTION

Excuses, excuses—we all have given and heard our share of excuses. We often make excuses so fast and with so little thought that we fail to realize how dangerous they can be. If we're lucky, we are able to learn the danger of using them to justify unsafe acts without experiencing permanent consequences. Luck, however, is just not something we can depend on to keep us safe and all too often our excuses have tragic results. To show these results, this program features many common workplace examples of people using excuses to justify unsafe acts. Our goal is to help viewers recognize risky excuses so they can stop, think and make a better choice.

PROGRAM OUTLINE

HOW MAKING EXCUSES PROGRESSES TO SITUATIONS RELATED TO OUR SAFETY

- We start making excuses when we are young usually to avoid doing something we don't want to do. For example, when Billy's mother asks him to clean up his room, he makes the excuse that he can't do it right then because the video game he is playing is almost over.
- Of course, excuses are not limited to children; as we get older some of us continue to make excuses to avoid certain activities.
- For example, an older Billy tells his wife he can't help her clean up the house because he's "in the middle of something important" (watching a football game).
- These types of excuses are common and usually not dangerous; unfortunately, somewhere along the way, we also learn to make excuses related to our safety.
- An example is younger Billy's mom telling him he might fall when climbing a tree. "Don't worry, I do this all the time," he responds before he falls and breaks an arm and a leg.
- As Billy found out, the excuses we use to place ourselves in danger won't protect us from the reality of our situation. Billy's flawed logic didn't change the fact that he was standing on a small limb high in a tree; it's a hard lesson to learn, but if we're lucky, we can learn it with only minor consequences.

EXCUSES CAN & DO HAVE TRAGIC RESULTS

- If we're lucky, we are able to learn the danger of using excuses to justify unsafe acts without experiencing permanent consequences. But luck is just not something we can depend on to keep us safe, and all too often our excuses can have tragic results.

- For example, here's some excuses we've heard, or used, to justify unsafe driving that have resulted in serious car crashes: "Everybody else is speeding and I can't be late for the meeting;" "It's still yellow; we'll make it through;" and "Look, I'm a good driver; I've never even had a ticket."
- In the aftermath of a tragedy, the excuse that preceded it seemed so trivial, so small; yet, just prior to these incidents these same excuses seemed to make so much sense they justified committing an unsafe act.
- Our excuses can and do have tragic consequences, and we often make these excuses so fast and with so little thought that we fail to realize just how dangerous they can be. We need to recognize these risky excuses so we can stop, think and make a better choice.

EXCUSES DON'T CHANGE THE REALITY OF OUR SITUATION

- A man using a chainsaw says, "Look, I know what I'm doing. I've been using a chainsaw since I was 10 years old. I've never had a scratch."
- A maintenance technician opening an electrical cabinet says, "No, I didn't personally do the lockout and verify zero energy, but this equipment is scheduled to be out of service for two more days. So I'm sure it's okay."
- A housewife standing on box in a chair to reach a cabinet says, "But I don't have a ladder; how else could I reach up there?"
- When we use excuses to justify unsafe acts, the person we are most trying to convince is us. But just as Billy learned while climbing the tree, we too must learn that excuses don't change the reality of our situation.
- Reality says that assumptions, hope or belief that equipment or machinery has been made safe, does not make it so. Electricity finds the shortest path to ground, even when that "path" thought nothing was energized.
- Reality says that your safety has no relation to your convenience. A box placed on a chair makes an unstable platform, even if you have no other way to reach what you are after.
- While these three examples may seem ridiculous, each one represents a common type of excuse and you may be more familiar with them than you realize.

SAFETY EXCUSE #1:

Prior Experience & Success Will Guarantee Your Safety

- A construction worker who's driving a nail without eye protection says, "I haven't been hit by a nail yet. Besides I don't miss—much."
- Another worker without a hardhat in a construction area says, "I've been working here 20 years and I've never been hit in the head by anything. Besides, I'll just be here a few minutes."
- A third worker climbing on a raised platform without fall protection says, "Look, I've got real good balance, better than most. Besides, I can move around better without it."
- These are all variations of the same flawed excuse; "I've had success in the past; therefore, I am safe today. Don't fall victim to this common excuse; your safety today depends solely on what you have done to stay safe today."

SAFETY EXCUSE #2:

Assuming It's Safe Makes It Safe

- An equipment operator who fails to inspect her forklift before operating it says, "It worked fine yesterday and the day before. I'm sure it's fine."

- A maintenance worker who neglects to read a chemical container's warning label says, "If this chemical were really dangerous, they wouldn't even let me use it. So it must be safe."
- A swimmer who prepares to dive into a pool without verifying the depth of the water below says, "The water looks great. I'm diving in."
- These excuses are all examples of assuming the safety of the situation rather than confirming the safety of a situation. Making assumptions about safety can quickly turn tragic.

SAFETY EXCUSE #3:

My Safety Is Directly Related To My Convenience

- A machine operator who holds his work material close to the cutting action of his machine says, "People keep walking off with my push bar. That thing is never around when I need it."
- A worker tightening a bolt with a wrench of the wrong size says, "I didn't have the right size wrench with me, but I did have a big pipe wrench. So I figured I'd just use that."
- An obviously impaired person who hasn't made plans for a designated driver asks, "Well, how am I supposed to get home?"
- These are all excuses based on the flawed logic that safety is somehow related to convenience. Safety is not always convenient; it does take extra effort.
- It takes effort to make sure you have the assist device when you need it; it takes planning to bring the correct tools to the job; and, it takes responsibility to have a designated driver or call for a cab when you've been drinking.
- Using these types of excuses to justify unsafe behavior is certainly an example of shortsightedness and poor decision-making.

HOW THE RESULTS OF MAKING EXCUSES AFFECT US & OUR LOVED ONES

- A worker in an asbestos abatement area who neglects to wear a respirator says, "I don't see how this stuff can be that dangerous; I'm not wearing this thing."
- A worker in a loud machine shop who refuses to wear hearing protection says, "I'm not wearing these ear plugs; it's not that loud in here anyway."
- An electrical worker who rejects his arc flash protection says, "I can't believe they expect us to wear this suit. I've done this job 1,000 times without an arc flash and I'm sure this time will be no different. Let's just get it done."
- Excuses like these not only place us at risk, they clearly show our ability to set aside reason and logic.
- At the funeral of the electrical worker, his widow says, "I just don't understand how this could happen; he had worked there so long. I mean he knew what he was doing."
- A visitor at the electrical worker's funeral tells his grieving widow, "At least you can take comfort knowing he got away with it the first 1,000 times."
- After such an incident, our loved ones wouldn't think much of our excuses.

WHAT OUR EXCUSES REALLY SAY TO OUR LOVED ONES

- We would probably be far less likely to take risky chances if had to attempt to explain them to our loved ones first.

- One worker explains to his wife, “Look honey, I know they spend time and money to train us in safety and procedures, but they don’t really want us to actually do all that stuff. So I don’t.”
- His excuse is really saying, “Look honey, if I’m willing to risk getting hurt or killed, I’m going to do it. I don’t care how it affects you. Besides, if something happens to me, you and the kids can always go live with your mother.”
- Another worker tells his son that he doesn’t shut down the process line when he’s working on the drives because he gets the job done five minutes sooner. “That’s how I make time to get my mid-morning cup of coffee,” he says.
- His excuse really says, “Look son, you don’t mean any more to me than five minutes and a cup of coffee. If I had to choose between you growing up without a father or me getting my coffee, I’m going for the Joe. Sweet dreams!”
- While most of us wouldn’t choose to say those things to our loved ones, that is exactly what we are saying when we use excuses and commit unsafe acts.

WARNING SIGNS

- We all know actions speak louder than words. This is why we need to take action to ensure our safety.
- Look for these warning signs: if you start to believe that your past experience will guarantee success; if you find yourself assuming rather than confirming a safety situation; or, if you begin to justify an unsafe act based on your convenience, stop and take a moment to think about that you are doing.

‘CULTURE’ EXCUSES & OTHER WORKPLACE ISSUES

- “Culture” excuses involve a broad category of excuses related to your work environment.
- Some examples of these excuses include “Just ignore it when the foreman harps about safety; he always did before he go promoted!”
- “Jerry always skips the lockout and nobody says boo. So I’ll be damned if I’m going to do it either.”
- “Everybody knows this new procedure is screwed up, that’s why we do it the old way.”
- “Always remember that production is number one no matter what they say about safety.”
- “Cleaning up that mess is not my job; let someone else do it.”
- Somehow, we feel justified, even empowered when using this type of excuse. Perhaps we may even be correct in some part of our argument, but in the end we must never forget that an excuse cannot change reality.
- If you place yourself or others in danger, even if you’re right, you’re still in danger. Winning an argument or making a point is a poor trade for a workplace injury.
- If you have concerns about a procedure, a supervisor, a co-worker or anything else related to your safety, follow your company’s process for addressing it and getting it resolved. Don’t use these issues as an excuse to commit an unsafe act.

PREPARE FOR THE SAFETY MEETING OR TRAINING SESSION

Review each section of this Leader's Guide as well as the videotape. Here are a few suggestions for using the program:

Make everyone aware of the importance the company places on health and safety and how each person must be an active member of the safety team.

Introduce the videotape program. Play the videotape without interruption. Review the program content by presenting the information in the program outline.

Copy the discussion questions included in this Leader's Guide and hand them out to the program participants.

Make an attendance record and have each participant sign the form. Maintain the attendance record written documentation of the training performed.

Here are some suggestions for preparing your videotape equipment and the room or area you use:

Check the room or area for quietness, adequate ventilation and temperature, lighting and unobstructed access.

Check the seating arrangement and the audiovisual equipment to ensure that all participants will be able to see and hear the videotape program.

Place or secure extension cords to prevent them from becoming a tripping hazard.

CONDUCTING THE PRESENTATION

Begin the meeting by welcoming the participants. Introduce yourself and give each person the opportunity to become acquainted if there are new people joining the training session.

Explain that the primary purpose of the program is to help viewers recognize common excuses that are used to justify unsafe acts so they can stop, think and make a better choice concerning their safety.

Introduce the videotape program. Play the videotape without interruption. Review the program content by presenting the information in the program outline.

Lead discussions about specific injuries and incidents that could happen at your facility should employees use excuses to bypass safe work practices.

Copy the discussion questions included in this Leader's Guide and allow the participants to review them before discussing the program.

WHAT'S YOUR EXCUSE?
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever used any of the excuses portrayed in the video? If so, which ones and what could the consequences have been?
2. If a co-worker made an excuse in order to bypass safe work practices, would you say anything to him or her? If so, what?
3. What do you think your spouse or kids would say if they heard you using excuses at work that compromised your safety?
4. Have you ever felt you were justified in making an excuse in a situation because some part of your argument was correct? What could the result have been, even though you thought you were right?
5. What will you do in the future if you find yourself preparing to use an excuse to justify committing an unsafe act?