



OREGON PACIFIC-CASCADE CHAPTER

**Safety Training Topics**

October 2022

Wildfire Smoke

Thank You!

Mental Health Awareness

Focus on the Fundamentals

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# SAFETY TRAINING TOPIC

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## Wildfire Smoke

### What is Wildfire Smoke?

Wildfire smoke is a mix of particles and gases containing many different kinds of chemicals. Gases include carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, and nitrogen oxides. Depending on the material that is burning, the gases could also include other compounds that are carcinogenic.

### What are the health effects?

- 1. If you have any existing lung or heart conditions, exposure to the smoke may aggravate those symptoms even more. The long term and short-term effects of the smoke depends on:**
  - a. Level of smoke
  - b. Duration of exposure
  - c. Age
  - d. Current medical conditions
- 2. In general, long term health risks (cancer or other chronic health problems) from short term exposure at low or moderate levels, are quite low. So, we don't need to freak out.**

### Some symptoms include:

- a. Irritation of the eyes, nose, and throat
- b. Headaches
- c. Worsening of allergies

### What can I do to limit my smoke exposure at work?

- 3. Most of us work outside, exerting large amounts of physical activity, which is not the best scenario for heavy, smoky days. Here are some ways you can protect yourself:**
  - a. Reschedule outside work if possible
  - b. Relocate work to a less smoky area if possible
  - c. Take breaks indoors
  - d. Stay hydrated (to avoid heat stress)
  - e. When driving, keep vents and windows closed, put A/C on re-circulate. Once you get to an area with better air quality, then open the windows to get the CO2 out.
  - f. PPE-If you feel you require more protection, you can wear a respirator. The most common type is the N95 particulate-filtering face piece respirator.
  - g. Keep in mind that respirators are not the same as masks (i.e., surgical masks, face coverings). Masks are loose fitting and don't have a tight seal that is required.
  - h. If you do choose to use a respirator, you must be fit tested to use them and they have to meet the standards (NIOSH-approved).

**What should I do if I experience wildfire smoke symptoms?**

If you're experiencing symptoms that you think are related to the smoke, treat it like any other first aid incident and report it to your supervisor.

From there, follow your company procedures for handling first aid.

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## Thank You!

During this pandemic, most of the construction industry has been classified by the government as essential and has been asked to keep working. Families and businesses depend on the work we build for clean water, reliable power, safe transportation, housing and as we've become especially aware these days, accessible health care facilities. You have not taken your vital role in an essential industry lightly.

Building on our already strong safety foundation, it is remarkable what we can do when we come together to creatively solve challenges. There are many ways we have shown the strength in our foundation. From instituting new health and safety protocols at our job sites to helping our healthcare clients with their emergency response, to supporting our first responders and giving to local foodbanks, we are more resilient when we work together with caring and compassion. We are proud of what you have accomplished on and off the construction jobsite.

Thank you for taking the time this week to build on your safety fundamentals, refresh your COVID-19 awareness and get smarter on mental health topics that affect more and more of us. These are the topics that reinforce that we are **Built on Safety**. Thank you for what you do every day to renew your safety commitment and keep America moving forward! We hope you take away many good lessons learned. Thank you for being a part of our industry and helping build better communities for all of us.

**Discuss these questions with your crew. Possible answers are listed below each question.**

1. **What are some ways the pandemic has made our jobsite safer?**
  - a. *Additional handwashing stations, reminders for not touching your face and washing your hands, social distancing, wearing of face covers, staying home if sick, cleaner jobsites*
2. **What safety procedures would you like to see continue on our following the pandemic?**
  - a. *Handwashing stations, disinfection of common surfaces, less crowded jobsites, improved housekeeping*
3. **What was your favorite part of safety week?**
  - a. *Discussion on Built on Safety, Discussion on the Fundamentals, Discussion on COVID-19, Discussion on Mental Health*
4. **What topics do you want to learn more about?**

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## Mental Health Awareness

Mental health and wellness, though never included in Safety Week before, may be one of the biggest safety issues on our jobsites today. When people who are struggling with substance abuse, depression, anxiety and personality disorders show up to work they are likely to be distracted and fatigued, and may have severely impaired judgment and perception. This could obviously result in incidents or injuries to themselves or someone else, or – at its worst case – self-inflicted injury or even death.

Construction is the second-leading industry at risk for suicide by men. Statistics show that rates of suicide thoughts, plans, and attempts are more than double that of the general population.

Why does it hit us so hard? There are many factors of our jobs that have an impact. First, it is a high-pressure industry. We are driven by schedule, budget and production demands. We are always pushing, and that can take a toll. Many construction workers travel regularly and are away from their families for extended periods of time. We deal with sleep disruption or deprivation due to shift work, and oftentimes manage seasonal or end-of-project layoffs. Many in our industry suffer from chronic pain that is the result of years and years of hard physical labor, and a high number of that population self-medicates with drugs or alcohol.

Last – but maybe most important, we are an “old school” and “tough” industry. This often prevents people from opening up, sharing shortcomings, or asking for help. This is what we need to fix. For many, a coworker could be a last line of defense. We need to educate ourselves and be on the lookout for warning signs, and we need to encourage people to open up and seek help when necessary.

I encourage you to take care of yourselves, take care of each other, and know who to go to for help. We are all in this together, and together we can eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health and asking for help.

Discuss ways your team can prioritize the mental health of all employees and share resources for where help can be found for those who need it.

**Discuss these questions with your crew. Possible answers are listed below each question.**

**1. What are some warning signs?**

- a. Increased or excessive use of drugs or alcohol*
- b. Anxiety*
- c. Difficulty sleeping or dramatic increase in sleeping*
- d. Lack of purpose or comments about having no reason to live*
- e. Withdrawal*
- f. Dramatic mood swings or uncharacteristic anger*
- g. Recklessness*

**2. How can you be an active listener? (getting people to share their struggles)**

- a. *Watch non-verbal signs*
- b. *Ask open-ended questions or prompt with "tell me more"*
- c. *Make sure to remain non-judgmental, and resist offering advice*
- d. *Reflect back key feelings or phrases to assure the person they are being heard*
- e. *You don't have to wait for the perfect time*

**3. IF you suspect that someone is considering suicide:**

- a. *Ask the direct question*
- b. *Thank them for sharing*
- c. *Provide hope and let them know that "we are a team"*
- d. *Keep them safe until they can get professional help*
- e. *Notify and hand off to the professionals*

**4. Encourage sharing and story-telling:**

- a. *Have you known someone who has dealt with a substance abuse problem?*
- b. *Do you know a teenager who has dealt with depression?*
- c. *Have you ever had a co-worker dealing with serious marital or financial issues?*
- d. *Have you ever known someone who attempted to commit suicide? (partner up for this question)*

**Crew Signatures:**

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# SAFETY TRAINING TOPIC

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## Focus on the Fundamentals

*“The minute you get away from fundamentals – whether its proper technique, work ethic or mental preparation – the bottom can fall out of your game, your schoolwork, your job, whatever you’re doing” (Michael Jordan).*

Michael Jordan is right; the bottom can fall out of your game without focusing on the fundamentals. In basketball, losing focus on the fundamentals will cause a player to miss a shot, miss a pass or a rebound. In the construction world, ***in our world***, losing focus on the fundamentals can have much more serious consequences. If we lose focus on the fundamentals, someone gets injured or worse.

We are currently in very challenging and trying times. We are having to approach and build our work differently as we try to protect ourselves, our co-workers and our families from the Coronavirus. These challenges cause distractions, which in turn can cause us to lose focus on the fundamentals.

To build our work safely, our employees need to know what the fundamentals are, and why they are important. It is also critically important that our employees follow the principles of Speak Up – Listen Up; that they are watching out for one another. If we can commit to watching out for one another, speaking up and listening, we can ensure that distractions don’t allow any of us to lose focus.

### **Crew Discussion:**

1. What are the basic safety fundamentals on this job?
2. What are some of the safety fundamentals that are unique to this project or task?
3. What safety fundamentals do we need to consider if there is a change in conditions on this project?
4. Why are safety fundamentals important and what are the possible consequences of losing focus on them?