

December 9, 2002

Hazards Don't Take Holidays

The year-end holiday season can be a hectic time. Both our work and home routines may be different from the usual. Many of us have a lot going on in our personal lives — traveling, entertaining, cooking, visiting, shopping and decorating.

The season can also be stressful, with worries about how to get it all done and pay for it too. Add to this the family tensions that tend to worsen around the holidays, and sadness about personal losses associated with the holidays, and you might have trouble giving your full attention to your job.

At work, you could be in a scramble to get work done before the end of the calendar year. Or seasonal slowdown or major maintenance work may take you away from your usual job routine. Whether the work pace is unusually fast or slow, you may be dealing with unfamiliar situations in the workplace.

No matter how many things are competing for your attention, you need to focus on safety while you work.

See if you recognize any of these seasonal distractions and hazards:

- Staying up late at parties, planning social events and rehashing them after.
- An extra workload because of short-staffing or year-end deadlines.
- Different job duties, as you fill in for vacationing co-workers, or take part in a seasonal equipment shutdown.
- Presence of unfamiliar workers temporarily replacing staff or working for plant maintenance contractors.
- Lapses in security routines because of different plant hours or a relaxed holiday attitude.
- Hurrying to finish work early to take care of personal errands.
- Worrying about family and financing.
- Thinking of time off and travel plans instead of thinking about the work at hand.
- Horseplay among co-workers who are taking advantage of less supervision.

So how can you work safely in spite of holiday season distractions? You can do so by making yourself pay attention to what you are doing and by getting enough rest so you can stay alert.

Consider these suggestions:

- Try to tune out personal distractions when you are on the job. Planning travel, recreation and gift shopping is to be done on your own time.
- Use task checklists when you have trouble concentrating or when you are doing unfamiliar work.
- Keep up the same standards of safe behavior you do the rest of the year. Clowning around can kill, so stay serious on the job.
- Stick with security policies even if the hours of work relax over the holidays. Question or report visitors you do not recognize.
- Look after your health by getting enough sleep and exercise and by eating regular light meals.

Safety Tip: **Be sure to practice safety on your own time too. Home decorations should be made with fire safety in mind. Do not overload electrical circuits with ornamental lighting. And, in case you have never heard this one before, don't drink and drive.**



