



Ergonomics & Ability, Optimized.

GUIDELINES FOR CREATING AND LEADING CUSTOMIZED TOOLBOX TALKS



A deliverable from a Human Factor Focused MSI Prevention Training for Construction Workers project supported by a grant from the Research and Workplace Innovation Program of the Workers' Compensation Board of Manitoba.

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ENABLING ACCESS INC.

Established in 2005, Enabling Access Inc. is a workplace injury prevention, rehabilitation and accessibility company, based in Winnipeg. Our team of occupational therapists offer job demands analysis, post-offer employment testing, ergonomic assessments, customized injury prevention and psychological safety training in both office and industrial workplace environments. Our extensive work assisting construction companies throughout the province, prompted the Human Factors MSI Prevention Training for Construction Workers project, which was supported by a Research and Workplace Innovation grant of the Worker’s Compensation Board of Manitoba. This Guidelines For Creating and Leading Customized Toolbox Talks is a practical resource deliverable from that project.

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TOOLBOX TALKS

Toolbox Talks, Safety Talks, or Safety Briefings are an effective way for construction companies (and companies in other sectors) to transfer workplace health and safety information and Safe Work Procedures (SWP) to workers in 15-20 minutes at the beginning or break in a shift. The objective is to help workers recognize and control hazards on the job. There are many sample Toolbox Talk topics and templates available online. SAFE Work Manitoba offers a variety of online Shop Talks, with topics specific to industry work. The Construction Safety Association of Manitoba offers their Toolbox Talks Safety Topics book, with many common topics specific to the work of their membership. Manitoba Heavy Construction Association also offers their WORKSAFELY program's online Safety Talks on a variety of heavy construction specific topics. Several other health and safety associations and private enterprises offer additional resources and have posted sample Safety Talks online, and provide Safety Talk Training for Safety Professionals and Supervisors.



The Safety Talks or Toolbox Talks content reviewed are written specific to construction projects, to meet legislative requirements, and support COR or SECOR audit requirements. They typically are one-page documents that include the identification of existing and potential hazards, communication and control information and a task example, specific to the topic. Outlined precautions and Safe Work Procedures are included. Few include 1 or 2 figures or photos to illustrate worker positioning or tool use. Typically, workers sign off as having attended and the supervisor or safety professional sign and date the document as completed. Many companies are building a database of these safety talks or keep hard copies of these documents in a binder to reference and update.

TOOLBOX TALK PITFALLS

Research and experience demonstrate that the information transferred to the worker using this information safety talk method, in some cases may not have a significant impact on actually changing worker behaviour. On-site observations and interviews with construction workers identified that although most workers know the Safe Work Procedures they are supposed to be using, many still choose to conduct the work using methods, equipment or tools different than what has been taught. Some of the rationale from the workers was that the intended tools were not available or that their way was faster, or more efficient. These interviews revealed also that workers who do the same job, often conduct the work differently than their co-workers. This variation in how work is actually being done may be due, in part to the variability in content and teaching style of these Toolbox Talks.

“We have regular safety meetings, teach Safe Work Procedures and use Toolbox Talks, but the workers still do it ‘their way’ and we don’t see much of a change in worker behaviour.”

-Safety Officer of large construction company in Manitoba

Although Toolbox Talks are a primary method for construction companies to provide workers with relevant site-specific safety information, many companies do not maximize their potential. These important teaching opportunities shouldn't end with getting workers to listen and sign off for their attendance. If Toolbox talks are only given to fulfill a legislative, or certification requirement, it is unlikely they will have an effective impact on improving workplace safety, or reduce injuries and near misses. The following are some identified elements that are missing from typical Toobox Talk content and delivery:

1) HUMAN FACTOR FOCUS (ERGONOMICS)

Musculoskeletal Injuries (MSI's) represent 63% of all time-loss injuries in Manitoba and 40% of these are ergonomic MSI's (Worker's Compensation Board of Manitoba, 2015). Unfortunately, in the vast samples of Toolbox Talks publicly available, MSI prevention and ergonomics are minimally included in task-specific safety talks. "MSI's are soft tissue damage or aggravation in the musculoskeletal system caused when demands exceed the tolerances of the connective or related soft tissues such as muscles, tendons, ligaments,

nerve, discs and joints. Damage can result from a single event or develop over time. Forceful effort, repetitive motions awkward or sustained postures, vibration, contact stresses and inadequate recovery times are common factors that can injure or aggravate tissues.” (Musculoskeletal Injury Prevention Strategy, SAFE Work Manitoba 2017)
Strains and Sprains continue to be leading source of injury in the Construction Industry.

When ergonomics or MSI prevention strategies are presented in Toolbox Talks they are typically taught as a separate topic, such as ‘Manual Material Handling’ or ‘Musculoskeletal Disorders’, and not often included as a component of each task-specific Toolbox Talk, which can have less relevance to the worker and less impact on changing worker behaviour. It is important to specifically include ergonomic risk factors and tips in each Toolbox Talk so workers can understand how the work affects their bodies and they can modify their behaviour to prevent injuries.

“Ergonomics is human centered design — the process of designing and fitting the job, tools, equipment, environment, tasks, work spaces, jobs and products to match the mental and physical capabilities of the worker at the micro level, and the work organization at the macro level.”

- Institute of Work and health 2003

2) HUMAN ERROR & SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Situational Awareness (SA) is another important safety concern, which is absent in most Toolbox Talk content. Situational Awareness is being aware of what is happening around you in terms of where you are, where you are supposed to be, and whether anyone or anything around you is a threat to your health and safety.

Situational awareness can be further reduced in times of high workload or when under pressure to get a job done to time. In these situations, it is essential to maintain a high level of situational awareness to stop accidents and near misses. Workers are multitasking, are distracted or preoccupied, and not focused on the task or environment, can make errors at work that result in injury. Complacency can also lead to injury and just reminding workers to keep their mind on the task, is not specific enough or meaningful enough to have an impact. Instead, Situational Awareness, especially for higher risk job tasks, needs to be included in Toolbox Talks and are most effectively taught through storytelling or experience sharing.

3) PHOTOS & ILLUSTRATIONS

Many of the Toolbox Talks reviewed do not have illustrations or photos. Instead they rely solely on the bulleted text and the teaching technique of the person who delivers the Toolbox Talk. Some use stick figure people to keep it simple and to use for general purposes, but these are hard to recreate if the task or Safe Work Procedures change. Pictures can also be very helpful for workers whose first language is not English. Toolbox Talk illustrations or photos can also help prompt the person delivering these sessions with the proper positioning or procedure to demonstration.



4) TASK AND SITE SPECIFIC CONTENT

Most Toolbox Talks are created to address tasks which are at higher risk of causing injury and are written in general terms so the content can be applied to as many job site and similar tasks as possible such as “Working in Confined Space”, “Working on Ladders”, or “Electrical Safety”. Unfortunately, the less specific the content, the less relevant it becomes and less impact it has on changing worker behaviour. Instead, companies should be creating toolbox talks that use the general principles of these general Toolbox Talks but then customize them, using photos of their own workers doing the work, using the tools and equipment intended for the job. Creating electronic Toolbox Talk templates is a great way to easily drop in photos and update content as the tasks change, weather changes and Safe Work Procedures change.

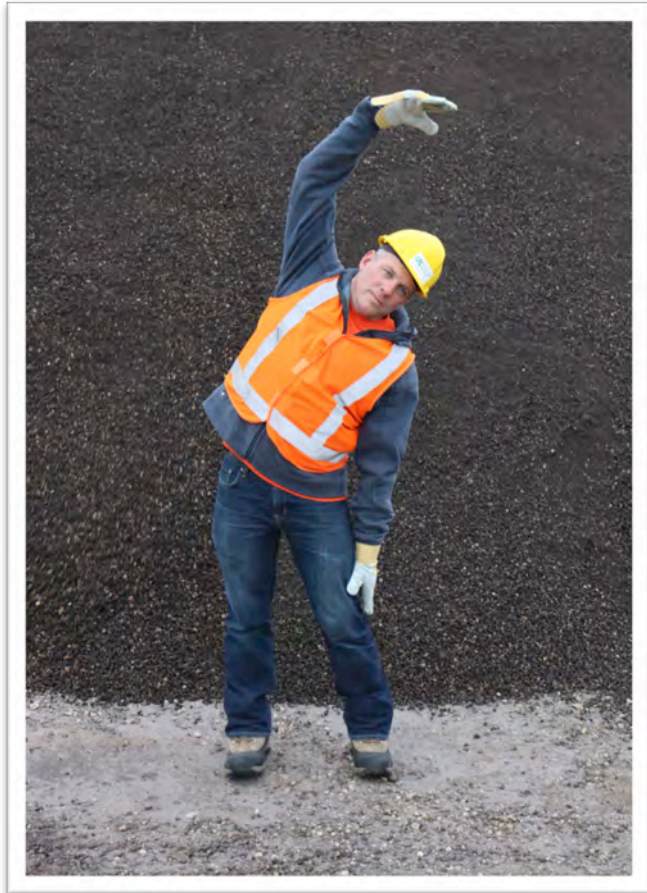
5) SUPERVISOR/ FOREMAN LEADERSHIP SKILLS

After interviewing many Supervisors and Foreman who teach Toolbox Talks, wide variations in injury prevention knowledge and experience is evident. It would be more difficult for those without task-specific MSI prevention training, to identify ergonomic risk factors, provide on-site corrective feedback and demonstrate targeted safe working behaviour every day. If these Supervisors are also delivering the Toolbox Talks may not be reaching their potential.

There also appears to be a gap in leadership training for Supervisors. Many Foreman or Supervisors start off as junior general laborers and as they become more skilled, advance into lead positions, including Shift Supervisors who then become

responsible for delivering ToolBox Talks. Safety Professionals are typically well equipped with the skills to deliver group presentations and safety talks as it often falls within their responsibilities. It should not be assumed that the shift Supervisors or Foreman come equipped with these same skills and confidence with speaking to groups.

All companies would benefit from providing leadership training to anyone who is expected to deliver Toolbox Talks so they can learn effective strategies for engaging participants, facilitating interaction and sparking conversation that just might evoke solutions to current safety issues they are having. Those who deliver Toolbox Talks should not only have knowledge in Safe Work Practices, but also understand and be able to demonstrate safe ergonomic behaviours (such as using proper body mechanics, warming-up and stretching) every day. Ergonomics and MSI Training should be provided to anyone leading these important safety information sessions.



TOOLBOX TALK LEADER TIPS

- 1) Include *specific* Human Factors such as Ergonomics and Situational Awareness tips in each Talk.
- 2) Customize content to make it relevant to the task and site. Ensure topics are seasonally relevant and work demands relevant. Use electronic template to duplicate and update.
- 3) Use photos of the workers demonstrating preferred body positioning and safe use of tools or equipment.
- 4) Ensure those delivering Toolbox Talks attend Leadership Training and are comfortable speaking and engaging a group.
- 5) Make the session interactive (Questions like “What could go wrong Here?” or “What would you do if...”) Conversations are welcomed more than lectures.
- 6) Ensure participation through physical demonstration and peer feedback. Allow them to ‘feel’ the intended working positions and safe techniques by trying it the way the Safe Work Procedures outline.
- 7) Make it memorable with the use of storytelling. Use experience or search online for injury news related to the topic task. (Close calls, friends who have been hurt, etc.
- 8) Use of Translator should be considered for on-site safety talks if workers do not use English as their first language. Make available supporting print material on request.