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No Room for Rough Stunts

Don't pull chairs out from under people. Don't jump on the couch. No running around the pool. No wrestling and no rough-housing. There were rules against horseplay when you were a child, and there are rules in your workplace today.

The reason horseplay is forbidden at work is the same reason that it was frowned upon at home and in school when you were young: somebody could get hurt. Rough play endangers you, your co-workers and even members of the public.

Horseplay, according to the dictionary, is rough or boisterous play or pranks. It is dangerous, and therefore has no place on the job. Horseplay distracts people from working safely. Practical jokes all too often involve electricity, compressed air, chemical reactions or dangerous driving — all of which can have fatal consequences.

One reason horseplay persists is that it makes a good story. Many of us have been entertained during the lunch break with tales of practical jokes. They get funnier with each telling until they become workplace legends. Even a safety meeting about horseplay can easily become a forum for telling these stories once again.

Horseplay story sessions don't usually include jokes gone wrong — the worker actually run down by the forklift driver pretending to do so or the person falling from a ladder when someone shook it. Nor do these stories recognize the embarrassment and humiliation of the victim of a gag. Horseplay has sometimes turned into homicide, when the victim became murderously angry.

Consider the following examples of horseplay and the possible consequences:

- ◆ Smearing petroleum jelly on safety eyewear. The victim starts work without eye protection and catches a particle in his eye.
- ◆ Tinkering with electrical equipment. The victim gets a worse shock than intended and receives permanent brain damage.
- ◆ Unexpectedly starting up a drill behind another worker. She is startled and tumbles off a scaffold.
- ◆ Tossing a heavy object to a co-worker. He injures his back trying to catch it.
- ◆ Wiring a door shut. It can't be opened fast enough for workers to escape a fire.

- ◆ Setting fire to a safety manual another worker is reading. She drops it and a fire burns out of control.
- ◆ Starting a water pistol war. The supervisor slips on the wet floor and the participants find themselves in hot water.
- ◆ Filling another worker's locker with junk. He gets a concussion when he opens the door and the contents rain down.
- ◆ Tripping someone walking by. This time the injured person is the practical joker, who takes a punch in the face from the intended victim.

As you can see, horseplay can quickly turn from entertaining to threatening. There are enough hazards at work without creating new ones.

How can you help stop horseplay?

- Don't engage in it. It is against the rules of behavior for your job and it could get you fired.
- Don't encourage or provide an audience for horseplay.
- Report horseplay to your supervisor.

Safety Tip: Don't trade safety for entertainment, amusement or a chance to show off. Halt horseplay!!

