

DOAS Loss Control Bulletin

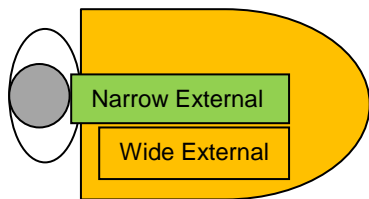
January 2012

Topic of the Month... Are You Paying Attention?

"You need to pay attention" is a phrase that many a supervisor has used in discussions about accidents. It seems an easy edict to follow, but people can be easily distracted by noise, surrounding activities and personal issues. What most people don't realize is that they can control their attention--and consequently become a safer and better employee. A person's attention span is just another part of the body; it can consciously be changed and controlled with practice and training. Loss of attention control can be a significant contributing factor in common injuries. When people are on the move in their job (or at home), blindly operating on "automatic pilot" is only effective when situations are unchanging. The continuing process of perceiving and making needed adjustments is critical to injury prevention when there are changing conditions--weather, traffic, and personal risk factors.



Attention is a crucial and often hidden element in safety. When well-controlled, it is an instrument for effectiveness in every realm of life. The first step in this process is to understand the different patterns that exist. Highly successful people control these patterns, flexibly shifting between styles.



Distractions can come from many directions whether from a narrow zone in front of you or a wider area around you. Internal Distractions are those items you bring to your workplace; your health, family issues, other personal concerns.

Various techniques and exercises can be used to develop greater attention "versatility." Workers who feel at the mercy of high-paced processes can learn and develop the ability to better control their attention. So what can be done? Here are some suggestions that can help boost attention, change attitudes and lead to considerable improvements in safety performance:

- Take control of yourself first. It can be seductive to blame others for the inability to control your attention, but it is critical that everyone uses self-control.
- Assess the specific contributing factors to loss of attention within your area; remove it, if possible.
- Enlist positive, realistic, involved goal-setting. Goals help focus attention.
- Design jobs so they provide a sufficient level of interaction and feedback, have specific goals and established procedures, and provide a sense of challenge.
- Enlist attitude development techniques such as mental rehearsal.
- Heighten eye control and coordination. This is a critical element in controlling attention. Internally, the eyes help organize movement.
- Make work--and safety programs--energizing. Solicit concerns, heighten enjoyment and laughter, and involve as many senses as possible.
- Focus your training on principles, judgment, personal interest and individual behavior, and personal control rather than memorizing rules and procedures.
- Help people develop automatic safe responses when there is no time to think. Training can help a person to overcome fear-based reactions, supplementing them with safe default behaviors when there is no time for conscious decision-making.

Here's the bottom line: recognize the power of attention, assess the factors that can block a daily focus on working safely, and apply practical methods to help others realize self-improvements in attitude and attention.

Thanks for your time. Let's work together to make Georgia a safer place to work.