

Playing Russian Roulette With Your Safety

Imagine that you take one bullet, place it in the cylinder of a revolver, you spin it, place the gun to your head and then pull the trigger. Nothing happens. So you spin the cylinder again, put the barrel to your temple and pull the trigger. Nothing happens. However, if you do this enough times it will get you. There is an extreme price to pay for such a reckless and self-inflicted act.

Here's an obvious question. How many times would you dare to undertake such dangerous behavior while working? The answer should be zero but read on.

Back in the era of the Vietnam War there were Vietnamese men who literally played real Russian roulette for big money hoping to get a bank roll so that they could leave the country and start a new life mainly in the United States. Some men won big but many, many men lost their lives playing this dangerous and inevitably lethal game.

Now imagine that you are working on a construction project where you are required to be 100% tied off if you are working above 6 feet. Otherwise you would need to be behind a hand rail system, or you would need to be six feet back from any leading edge.

You are working on a wall form 25 feet in the air with a body harness on and have been properly tied off when you reach a corner where you need to turn and continue doing elevated work. You have unhooked one lanyard and your positioning hook and then stepped around the corner on rebar, which you think is providing good footing. You unhook the other lanyard and do not reconnect your first lanyard. Without fall protection, you move laterally eight feet to your next work location.

What did you do? You just willfully put yourself at risk to fall 25', potentially to your death. You might think, "*It is only going to take me a few seconds to move the 8 feet that I need to in order to get to my next work location . . .*" and you go ahead and do so. You then attached one lanyard and your positioning hook without incident. However, what you did was play real Russian roulette with your own safety. Yeah, you got away with it this time. I want to reinforce the following for you, everyday there are people who do not get away with it and they, along with their families, suffer the consequence of such an unsafe and life-threatening act.

Regarding this willful unsafe act, which violates both OSHA Standards and company policy, what if the rebar were wet or icy or it was windy and raining? Your risk for falling would significantly go up due to these weather factors being added into the equation. You might have looked around and verified that no one was looking so you could get away with doing the wrong thing but in fact you were risking your life. For your information, reader, on the last construction project I worked on before retiring, two men in a similar scenario as described above actually slipped and went into "fall arrest" while

wearing full body harnesses. The positive thing is that they suffered no injury because they were properly tied off above their heads while complying with 100% fall protection methods. Proper PPE and its correct use very well saved two lives or, at a minimum, kept those men from being seriously injured. Right action got the right result.

Time and time again people do foolish things and actually put themselves at risk for being seriously injured or killed while on the job. Even worse, sometimes their unsafe action can put others at risk as well. However, there is no acceptable excuse for this kind of unsafe action by any worker, ever.

Perhaps some people unwittingly commit the unsafe act but the fact is the vast majority of people know what they are doing and willfully choose to play Russian roulette with their own safety.

It's been said, "You can't fix stupid." While I personally disagree with that statement, what you can and should do in the moment is reprimand for a minor offence or possibly send them home for one to three days or actually terminate such a stupid person for a serious violation as a part of accountability. Further, you must openly remind all workers that any unsafe action on their part will result in a similar termination. Zero tolerance has to be in place in order to achieve safety success. It must be consistent and clearly conveyed to all workers if you hope to stop "stupidity". As well, you need to document all forms of accountability and workers must know that this is being recorded on a project log.

To recap, people must be held accountable; people must call each other out if they witness such stupidity, i.e. any unsafe act; and people need to know that going home safe each and every day requires that people do the right thing 100% of the time, even when no one is looking. Safety first or safety always should be the safety mantra that is never compromised.

This extreme safety issue is a challenge that can be overcome. For more answers and insight, I invite you to look at our book, *Safety Under Construction—A Quest for Safety Perfection Utilizing Inventive Thinking* where we discuss in depth the psychological aspects of safety that include how we are affected mentally, emotionally and physically. It is a must-read for individuals and anyone who wants to dramatically improve the Culture of Safety within your organization and make unlimited strides for safety success.

Go to: <http://www.SafetyUnderConstruction.com> in order to obtain a great sense of this newly published book on safety and risk. There you will see a representative preview and reviews of a book that needs to be read, taken to heart and shared. Lives depend on it.

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