



October 2020 Newsletter

From the President's Perspective:

October is Fire Safety Month. As safety professionals, we are (hopefully) very aware of the hazards of uncontrolled fires. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) in 2019, there were:

- **1,291,500 fires**
- **3,704 deaths**
- **\$14.8 Billion in fire losses**

Talk about fire safety with your organization, co-workers, family and friends. Fire not only kills, but causes severe property losses that causes major disruptions in life. But fire safety is not my main topic, the main topic is related to why we experience fire losses like we do.

That topic is Risk Tolerance. Back in August, the Risk Management Practice group of ASSP sponsored a webinar by Joel Tietjens, CSP, CHMM, FASP. Joel is one of the leading edge thought leaders on how people perceive risk. First, let's define risk as the probability and severity of loss from exposure to a hazard. This is something we are faced with every day; actually, all our lives. We are exposed to risk constantly; your kids are playing with Lego's in the house, you have a "no shoes in the house" rule, what's the chance you will step barefoot on a Lego?

Now let's talk about Risk Tolerance. It's the amount of risk you are willing to assume in pursuit of a goal or action. This is an important concept to understand; Having a "no shoes in the house" policy was probably adopted to avoid spreading dirt in the house as well as avoid wear and tear on the floor. Stepping on a Lego barefoot will make you wish you were wearing your puncture and impact resistant workboots (As well as use a LOT of Bad Words!).

By the way, regarding mowing the lawn barefoot or in flip-flops (after all, it is hot out during the summer...): A study conducted by emergency room doctors from Johns Hopkins University Medical Center in 2018 determined that of the 51,151 injuries reported from lawnmowers from 2006 to 2013, 10,122 (20%) were to people's feet. Most were to hands. Although modern lawnmowers have been designed for safer operation (most lawnmower safety devices can be bypassed), it still does not alter the most severe outcome of an event, amputation. Why do we accept this risk?

We think we control risk well. We implore the kids to pick up toys after they are done and carefully inspect the area to make sure they don't miss a Lego. We don't bypass the guarding systems on our lawnmowers, making sure they work properly. In short, we exercise good risk controls so that undesirable outcomes don't happen. As Joel states: "That's the problem!"

We overestimate our ability to evaluate the condition and we become familiar with the controls as well as the operating environment. We rely too much on the process we designed to control the hazard because it always worked before. We underestimate the hazard (especially in view of the controls we designed) and feel that we are in control because there has never been an



undesirable outcome (foot injury from Legos or lawnmowers) in our memory. As such, we feel that the additional cost of control is not worth the additional investment (wearing, protective shoes); we gain comfort of going barefoot in hot weather and think we are keeping our house cleaner. But are we really setting ourselves up for a failure that can lead to serious injury by our thinking?

Yes, we are. But we can succeed in avoiding an undesirable outcome with good risk evaluations and avoiding complacency. It's adopting the mindset that we can honestly evaluate risk and actively apply controls to prevent undesirable outcomes. It goes beyond running through a checklist (actual or mental) before doing a task; it's adopting the mindset that there are risks we can accept (stepping on a Lego) or can't (like suffering a life altering foot injury) and doing what it takes to avoid it.

Now back to fires. Yea, fires. We can prevent them. We know how. So, why do we tolerate fire risk and allow fires to start? Review your Risk Tolerance using the above guidelines to challenge your Risk Evaluations and determine if your fire safety controls are adequate. Also, change the batteries in your smoke detector or change your smoke detector to those with long life batteries.

Some updates:

Karen Peissinger, our Past President, is the Safety Professional of the Year for 2019-2020. We thank Karen for her work in keeping our Chapter on track for the last 3 years. Congratulations to a deserving Chapter Member! Karen's continuing efforts in helping us maintain a digital presence are invaluable.



A well deserving SPY!

The National Association of Women In Construction is also seeking women who work in the Construction Industry or allied groups (engineering, insurance, or suppliers) who want to network and take advantage of professional development opportunities. See the Niagara Frontier Chapter LinkedIn page for more details.

**Buffalo Emerging Contaminants VIRTUAL
EnviroWorkshop – Wednesday, October 14th**

REGISTER ONLINE:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/96562819381227277>

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