

HEALTH AND SAFETY ADVISORY

MOBILE DEVICES

A DANGEROUS DISTRACTION ON CONSTRUCTION SITES



There are many hazards associated with using your mobile device on a construction site, especially when operating or working around vehicles and equipment. If you're using a mobile device on site, it means that you're not paying full attention to the task at hand and the hazards that surround you.

Struck-by incidents are a common cause of injury and death on busy worksites with lots of moving vehicles and equipment. By limiting the use of mobile devices, workers will be less distracted and less likely to be struck by moving vehicles and equipment.

In Canada and the United States, struck-by incidents continue to be among the top three causes of injury and fatality on construction sites. Many of these incidents can be attributed to distractions, specifically the distractions caused by using mobile devices.

This tragic case from British Columbia clearly shows the danger:

At an active construction site, sections of land were being preloaded with sand and gravel. The section manager was walking across the landing to check the height of the settlement gauges. At the same time, a loaded dump truck arrived and the driver was reversing towards the landing to release a load. While the manager was walking, he made a call on his mobile phone to the engineer about the gauges. Meanwhile, the truck was still reversing and the backup alarm was sounding normally. The driver was in visual contact with the spotter through his side-view mirror. The spotter briefly turned away from the reversing dump truck to check behind him, and at the same time, the manager crossed behind him and into the path of the truck. The spotter did not notice him. Still talking on the phone, the manager stopped with his back to the truck, unaware that it was backing up immediately behind him. The truck's rear tires snagged the back of his leg and pulled him under the truck. He later died from his injuries.*



Safety Guidelines

The safety guidelines listed below will help protect workers from this type of injury:

- Do not use mobile devices on the worksite unless authorized by your supervisor. This includes talking, texting, emailing, playing games, etc.
- Never use a mobile device while operating any equipment or when driving a vehicle.
- Wait until your lunch or rest break to use your mobile device for personal calls or other activities. And only use it in a designated safe-work area such as a jobsite trailer or break areas.
- Turn off your mobile device completely when working. The ringer may startle you or someone else in the area (or tempt you to answer the call, email, or text).
- Let calls go straight to voicemail. You can listen to them at a later time in a safe location.
- Never operate your mobile device near flammable fumes or liquid, or in a flammable environment.
- If an urgent personal matter requires that you have ready access to your mobile device, work out a plan with your supervisor to do it safely.

Safety Responsibilities

All workplace parties have some level of responsibility to make sure the safety guidelines are put in place, communicated to all workers, and carried out.

Employer

As an employer, you are required to take every precaution reasonable under the circumstances for the protection of a worker (OHSA, s. 25 (2)(h)).

This can involve:

- Making a policy on the appropriate use of cell phones or mobile devices part of your company's health and safety program
- Clearly reviewing and making sure workers understand your mobile device policy as it relates to section 18 of regulation 213/91: ensure that every worker at the project has ready access to a telephone, two-way radio, or other system of two-way communication in the event of an emergency
- Providing workers with a lockbox where they can store their mobile devices while they are working. This will lessen the chance that the devices will be used on the worksite, where they could become a distraction.

Supervisor

As a supervisor, you must be an example to the other workers. Don't take or make calls while directing activities on the worksite. Limit your mobile device use to the trailer, site office, or designated safe-work area away from general work activities.

Worker

As a worker, you should know what your company's rules are and follow them. If your company does not have a policy, encourage them to develop one. Remember: It's not just you. Your co-workers can also become distracted, putting your life in danger.

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*"Human Factors Bulletin 2011-03," WorkSafeBC website, accessed May 2015,
www2.worksafebc.com/i/posters/2011/HF_11_03.html