As we build more smart roads and infrastructure, utilize the internet of things to connect more devices and equipment with databases, and applications — and have much of it communicate with workers — it is important to review and update our thinking on Safety around the work site.

Despite significant improvements in technology, equipment, training, and PPE, there are still far too many accidents and injuries on a daily basis in the workplace. This is especially true for the contractor and construction markets, where most work space is outside and the risks and hazards are more varied and variable on a day-to-day basis. Well over 20% of deaths in the workplace occur in the Construction sector. This reality demands a far higher standard of excellence regarding safety training, procedures and day-to-day management of the work site and engagement with workers.

With all of the improvements in safety, broadly speaking, the innovations with technology and the expansion of the workforce, it is too easy to presume that much of the risk and danger in our workplace has been addressed and need not be a concern. The reality is that with all of the technological changes and improvements, the need for basic safety process is more important than ever. No amount of automation, “smart” equipment or alerts and warning messages can replace the responsibility and necessity for each worker owning a piece of creating a safe workspace.

All of this progress can easily lead us to believe that someone or something will keep us safe. While these are possible backstops for safety, the reality is we each must own our safety on and off the job. Through this ownership we can help build better safety cultures in our respective organizations while improving the healthy longevity of our careers and lives.

The phrase “If you see something, say something,” which we all know and generally associate with travel, is really a very appropriate mantra for the workplace. Each worker is much more likely to be aware of an unsafe situation or circumstance and has the immediate ability to communicate with his or her co-worker to improve each other’s safety. Every worker wants to go home with all of their physical and mental abilities each and every day. We all can be the someone who helps insure the likelihood of this accomplishment. This is not about reporting issues - this is about looking out for each other and helping all workers on a site or in a plant to make smart and safe decisions.

Time and planning are key components of safe work practices and outcomes. Much of the technology tools, gadgets and apps are designed to make life easier while also providing efficiency and speed in many of the tasks and activities we do. It is this push for more, faster, better, etc. that can also lead to unsafe conditions or outcomes. Just because the new piece of equipment has cameras, sensing devices, warning lights and sounds and perhaps even “fail-safe” attributes does not mean that a safe outcome is virtually guaranteed.

The more our world is advanced and automated, the more we need to be focused on planning our work and working our plan. No matter how easy, fast or “safe” the process may seem, making the time to be as certain as possible about risks and how to avoid or mitigate them is critical. This is especially relevant given how new technologies change the way work is completed. The old adage, “Go slow to go fast” is a very purposeful and practical state of mind. If the right upfront time is invested in planning through the day’s tasks and situations, the more likely it is that possible risks or problems will surface ahead of time and can be managed or avoided altogether.

Embrace the emerging technologies, equipment, and tools, but equally embrace the basics of safe work habits and practices so that the mindset of everyone on the job is focused squarely on going home as healthy as you arrived. Your children, spouses, co-workers, suppliers, customers, and you will all benefit in the long run.

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