

THE SAFETY OBSERVER

Safety Information for Employees

NO LAUGHING MATTER

Horseplay on the job can make for a good laugh, but sometimes practical jokes go wrong and people get hurt, and some people even lose their jobs. That's when the fun is not worth a quick laugh. Practical jokes and goofing around have been entertaining ever since we were all in grade school. The victim of a joke may not always consider it entertaining, especially if they get hurt.

Throwing objects, wrestling, putting something in a coworker's food, or pulling a chair from someone about to sit in it are all jokes we've all experienced either as the prankster or as the victim. They all may seem harmless by the prankster but the reaction of the victim is always unpredictable. A sudden surprise (like the fake spider) can cause someone to jump and hit his or her head or strain a muscle. A thrown object can easily poke out an eye.

So why would someone resort to a joke that could potentially hurt someone else? Often a prankster will joke around as a way to alleviate boredom or even stress. Some people may target a coworker they are envious of to try and make them look foolish in front of others. There are different reasons one may use another coworker as the target of a joke, but the results are often the same - somebody gets hurt.

Workplace jokes are the product of someone not paying attention to their job, and also distract coworkers from doing their work. It's not always the actual joke that may cause someone to be injured. A brief distraction can easily cause an accident, especially if machinery, electricity, or chemicals are involved.

Not only is the person targeted in a prank at risk, but the person performing the prank is also. If they were to accidentally cause a coworker to get injured, they are the ones who will be looked upon as the fool. Injuries to employees cost money, and disciplinary action will be taken for horseplay on the job. Causing an accident while trying to be funny can also cause them to lose their job.

Encourage a prankster to stop with the jokes by ignoring them, or better yet, let your supervisor know about the practical jokes. This will give the supervisor the opportunity to talk to the coworker to prevent jokes from continuing. Nobody wants to be a "tattle-tale", but more importantly it's a safety practice in preventing a potential injury. And, whether they realize it or not, you might just be saving them their job.