

SafeSupervisor

Newsletter

Your front-line manager safety resource since 1929

OCTOBER 2026



This Month's Highlights

This issue explores practical ways to build safer, stronger workplaces. Discover what workplace leaders can learn from insurance losses, what effective mental health training should actually teach, and how these insights can strengthen your safety program. Read more highlights inside, and visit ilt.safetynow.com to view the full articles.



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Claims as Curriculum

What Workplace Leaders Can Learn From Insurance Losses

Every closed claim contains two outputs: a financial result and a prevention lesson.

For OHS managers and HR directors, that second output can be just as valuable as the first. Insurance companies have an unusually broad view of workplace risk. They see injuries across industries, employers, locations, job types and operating conditions. They see what happens after a control fails, what a seemingly small exposure costs when it escalates, and which loss patterns keep returning.

An individual employer may experience one serious hand injury in five years. An insurer may see dozens of similar injuries across its book during the same period. That broader perspective creates an opportunity for employers: learn not only from your own claims, but from the patterns emerging across organizations like yours.

Look Beyond the Claim Code

Claims data can identify frequency, severity and trends, but a code such as “struck by object,” “overexertion” or “slip and fall” is too broad to become useful training on its own. It describes the outcome category, not necessarily the work system that produced it.

The prevention lesson often sits in the narrative.

A worker struck by a suspended load, for example, may have been working in an area where staging had gradually migrated into a lifting zone, crews were operating on different schedules, radio terminology was inconsistent, or the worker believed the lift had stopped because the crane was momentarily stationary.

Those details create a prevention story. The code does not.

The same applies to musculoskeletal claims. “Back strain” does not tell an employer whether the underlying pattern involved awkward storage heights, understaffed two-person lifts, a new packaging configuration, unrealistic throughput targets or poor equipment availability.

For OHS leaders, the question should therefore move from “What happened?” to “What conditions made this event possible?”

Learn the Mechanism, Not Just the Mistake

Claims narratives can easily focus on the last visible human action: the worker entered the zone, the driver looked away, the employee lifted incorrectly, or the supervisor failed to enforce a rule.

That may be relevant, but it is rarely the entire prevention lesson.

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A stronger review asks what made the unsafe action reasonable or possible at the time. Was the procedure practical? Was the worker new to the task? Was production sequencing different? Was equipment unavailable? Did the supervisor have competing priorities? Was the hazard obvious only in hindsight?

This is not about removing accountability. It is about extracting a lesson broad enough to prevent recurrence.

OHS and HR leaders can ask:

- What did the people involved believe was happening immediately before the event?
- Which warning signs were present, and which were missed?
- Which control was absent, weak, bypassed or misunderstood?
- What conditions made the error more likely?
- What could a comparable employee or supervisor change before the same pathway develops?
- Which corrective actions address the system rather than simply reminding workers to be careful?

Look for Patterns Beyond Your Own Workplace

One of the most powerful advantages of insurer data is its ability to reveal patterns that may not yet be visible within a single organization.

Several individual collisions may reveal a common combination of route pressure, unfamiliar locations and backing maneuvers. Multiple contractor injuries may point to weaknesses in how host employers plan interfaces with contractors. A cluster of injuries among recently hired workers may reveal gaps

in equipment familiarity, buddy practices or supervisor follow-up. The lesson for employers is simple: ask your insurer and broker what they are seeing.

A carrier that can say, “We are seeing a pattern across businesses like yours; here is what those losses are teaching us,” can provide a risk perspective that an individual employer could not accumulate on its own.

Make Prevention Measurable

The strongest approach does not stop when a case study or training module is published.

Employers should ask what action is expected after the lesson. Did supervisors discuss it? Were workers assigned relevant learning? Was the exposure inspected? Was a control changed? Was field follow-through documented?

The objective is not simply to count course completions. It is to move from insight to documented action and, where practical, determine whether the targeted exposure improves. This is where claims-derived learning can become part of a broader OHS management system rather than another standalone training initiative.

The Bigger Opportunity

Claims departments are designed to resolve losses. Loss-prevention organizations are designed to stop future ones. The opportunity for employers is to connect those two missions by using claims experience as a source of prevention intelligence.

For a deeper look at how insurers can systematically turn claims experience into targeted training, supervisor resources, policyholder campaigns and measurable prevention activity, read the full [*Claims as Curriculum*](#) guide.

Mental Health

What Mental Health Training Should Actually Teach

Mental health training has become an important part of workplace safety, but effective training needs to go beyond simply raising awareness. Workers and supervisors need practical skills they can use when stress, workload, conflict, or other pressures begin to affect people and their work. The goal isn't to turn employees into mental health experts—it's to help them recognize concerns, respond appropriately, support one another, and understand how psychological factors can interact with physical safety. Here are five areas effective mental health training should address.



Mental health literacy without amateur diagnosis

Workers and supervisors benefit from knowing that stress can affect concentration, energy, sleep, communication, decision-making, and behaviour. They should also understand that people respond differently to pressure and difficult events.

Training should stop short of teaching people to diagnose co-workers. A supervisor does not need to decide whether someone has anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, or another condition. The supervisor needs to recognize a meaningful change, understand the work and safety context, have a respectful conversation, know the organization's procedures, and connect the person to appropriate support.

This is an important design boundary. Awareness increases safety. Amateur diagnosis can create stigma, privacy problems, false confidence, and inappropriate management decisions.

The connection between psychological strain and physical safety

Mental-health training becomes more relevant to safety-sensitive work when it connects directly to operational consequences. A worker under sustained strain may be distracted, fatigued, less willing to communicate, slower to process changing conditions, or more likely to rely on familiar shortcuts. A crew experiencing conflict may stop sharing information. A supervisor under extreme pressure may react defensively when someone raises a concern.

The training message should not be that a person experiencing stress is unsafe or unreliable. That would stigmatize normal human responses. The message is that conditions affecting attention, judgment, communication, recovery, or willingness to speak up can interact with physical hazards. Good safety systems make room for people to recognize and manage those conditions before risk escalates.

How to recognize changes that deserve attention

Training should focus on observable changes rather than labels. Examples may include a worker who is unusually withdrawn, having repeated conflicts, struggling to concentrate, making uncharacteristic errors, appearing overwhelmed, or saying that they cannot manage the current demands.

Any one sign may have many explanations. The purpose is not to infer a diagnosis. It is to notice when a conversation, workload review, safety check, or referral to support may be appropriate.

How to start a supportive conversation

One of the most valuable supervisor skills is knowing how to respond when something appears wrong without becoming intrusive.

A practical approach is to stay with what is observable and work-related:

- Describe what you have noticed without judgment. "I have noticed you seem to be having a difficult time keeping up with the changeover this week."
- Ask an open question. "Is there something about the work or workload we should talk about?"
- Listen rather than immediately solving or correcting.
- Clarify immediate work and safety needs. Does the person need relief from a safety-sensitive task, a break, another worker, or supervisor assistance?
- Explain available resources and next steps within the organization.
- Protect privacy and avoid asking for clinical details the supervisor does not need.

Training should also tell supervisors what not to do: do not promise confidentiality

you cannot keep, do not interrogate, do not minimize the concern, do not diagnose, and do not tell someone to simply toughen up.

How to use resilience skills without hiding the hazard

Individual resilience skills can be useful when they are taught as practical tools, not moral expectations. These can include recognizing personal warning signs, using brief recovery periods, preparing for high-pressure work, maintaining boundaries, asking for clarification, using peer support, and knowing when to seek professional help.

The trainer should repeatedly connect these techniques to the control-before-cope principle.

A breathing technique may help someone regain composure after a difficult interaction. It does not eliminate an abusive customer policy. Better sleep habits may improve recovery. They do not fix a schedule that systematically prevents adequate rest. A worker can learn to communicate boundaries. Management still has to respond when those boundaries reveal unsafe workload.

Wrapping It Up

Effective mental health training isn't about teaching workers to diagnose problems or simply become more resilient. It's about giving people practical tools to recognize changes, communicate concerns, respond appropriately, and know when additional support is needed.

Most importantly, training should reinforce that psychological safety is a shared workplace responsibility. Individual coping strategies can help, but they should never replace efforts to address the workload, conditions, behaviours, and hazards contributing to the problem.

Safety Talk

Compressed Air & Pneumatics: Hidden Blast and Impact Hazards Meeting Kit

Compressed air is one of those tools' workers use every day without thinking much about it. That familiarity is exactly what makes it dangerous. The pressure in a standard shop airline is high enough to penetrate skin, rupture an eardrum, or send a fitting across the room like a projectile. You do not have to misuse it badly to get seriously hurt. A moment of carelessness with a pressurized line is enough.

What's the Danger

Most compressed air incidents happen not because of equipment failure but because workers underestimate what they are working with. The pressure is far higher than it looks or feels.

The most serious risk is air injection. Pointing compressed air directly at skin, even briefly and through clothing, can force air into the bloodstream. This is called an air embolism, and it can be fatal even at pressures that seem low. There is no safe pressure threshold for aiming a pressurized hose at a person. This applies to yourself, to coworkers, and to using it as a cleaning shortcut on your clothing.

Hose and fitting failures are another major hazard that workers tend to underestimate. A hose that separates from its fitting under pressure whips violently, with enough force to fracture bones or cause serious eye injuries to anyone nearby. Fittings that are worn, over-pressurized, or improperly installed can eject suddenly and travel at high speed. This is exactly why inspecting every connection before pressurizing the line is not optional.

How to Protect Yourself

The rules around compressed air exist because the injuries it causes are serious, often permanent, and almost entirely preventable. Follow them every time, not just when a supervisor is watching.

Never Aim Air at a Person — This rule has no exceptions. Not at yourself, not at a coworker as a joke, and not through clothing to knock off dust. Even a brief burst at low pressure can inject air into the bloodstream and cause a fatal embolism with no visible warning beforehand.

Inspect Before You Connect — Check every hose for cracks, cuts, abrasions, kinks, or loose connections before you pressurize the line. A hose that looks fine on the outside may be weakened or compromised internally and still hold long enough to give you a false sense of security. If anything looks worn or damaged, tag it out and replace it before connecting to air.

Wear the Right PPE — Safety glasses are required any time compressed air is in use nearby, not just when you are the one holding the hose. Particles from blowdown nearby can reach your eyes in a fraction of a second. For extended work with pneumatic tools, ear protection is also required. Make sure your safety glasses are impact-rated for flying debris, not just designed for dust or chemical splash. .

Final Word

Compressed air is a powerful tool that deserves the same respect as any other piece of equipment on the job site. Treat it that way every single time, and the injuries associated with it become almost entirely preventable.

Visit [ILT.SafetyNow.com](https://www.ilt.safetynow.com) or scan the QR code on the cover to access the full meeting kit, including the quiz and other supporting material.

Safety Talk

Housekeeping Matters: Clean Floors, Clear Aisles, Safer Workplace Meeting Kit

A cluttered, dirty workplace doesn't just look unprofessional. It actively creates the conditions for injuries. Slips, trips, and falls are among the most common causes of lost-time injuries across every industry, and the majority of them are caused by something that could have been cleaned up or moved. Good housekeeping is one of the simplest and most effective safety actions you can take, and it costs almost nothing.

What's the Danger

Mess and clutter don't cause accidents by themselves. They set the stage so that a normal action, like walking, turning, or carrying something, suddenly goes wrong.

Slips and Spills - Spilled liquids and wet floors are one of the most common causes of same-level falls. A spill that sits for a few minutes is long enough for someone to walk through it without noticing.

Cluttered Aisles - Boxes, pallets, and equipment left in walkways force people to step around obstacles, often while carrying something or not looking at the floor.

Loose Cords and Cables - Cords running across walkways are easy to miss, especially in low light.

Blocked Emergency Equipment - Fire extinguishers, exits, and emergency stations only help if people can reach them. Material stacked in front of these turns a fast response into a dangerous scramble.

Unstable Storage - Items stacked too high or piled carelessly can shift and fall, especially

when someone moves past. A falling box is bad. A falling pallet is worse.

How to Protect Yourself

Keeping your workspace clean and organized is not a chore added on top of the real work. It is part of doing the job safely. Here is how to make it stick.

Keep Walkways Clear - Aisles exist so people can move without obstacles. If you need to set something down, even briefly, keep it out of the path people walk.

Manage Cords and Hoses - Route cords along walls or use cord covers when they cross a walkway. If you cannot do either, flag the cord clearly so people see it before they reach it. Never leave a hose or extension cord lying across an active path without warning.

Store Things Properly - Heavy items go on lower shelves. Stack only as high as is stable. If something looks like it could shift or tip, fix it.

Wear the Right Footwear - Slip-resistant footwear makes a real difference on wet or uneven floors. Check your soles regularly.

Clean as You Go - Housekeeping is not a task you do at the end of the shift. It is something you do throughout the shift. Put tools away when you are done with them. Pick up material when you are finished with it.

Report What You Cannot Fix - If you spot a hazard you cannot clean up or move on your own, report it right away.

Final Word

A clean workspace is a safe workspace. Every spill you clean up, every aisle you keep clear, and every cord you route properly is a potential injury you just prevented. It takes seconds. It saves careers.

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Safety Talk

Visual Fatigue: Lighting, Glare and Worker Performance Meeting Kit

Your eyes work hard every shift. When the lighting is bad, too dim, too bright, or full of glare — your eyes strain to compensate, and over time that affects how well you see, how fast you react, and how many mistakes you make. Poor lighting doesn't just hurt your eyes. It hurts your safety.

What's the Danger

Most workers don't connect a near-miss or an error to the lighting in their area. But poor lighting is a hidden factor in more incidents than people realize.

Dim or Insufficient Light - When there isn't enough light to see clearly, workers misjudge distances, miss details, and fail to spot hazards like spills, uneven surfaces, or moving equipment. Tasks that require precision, reading labels, operating controls, inspecting materials become error prone.

Eye Strain and Visual Fatigue - Squinting, focusing, and adjusting to poor light all day is exhausting work for your eyes. Visual fatigue shows up as headaches, dry or burning eyes, blurred vision, and difficulty concentrating all of which slow you down and increase the chance of an error or incident.

Screen and Detail Work - Workers doing close-up tasks reading gauges, inspecting parts, using computers or tablets are especially vulnerable to visual fatigue when lighting conditions aren't matched to the work.

Shadows in Work Zones - Poor light placement creates shadows that hide trip hazards, equipment edges, and spills. Workers may move into shadowed areas with less caution

because they can't see what's there. Loading docks, stairwells, and storage areas are common problem spots.

How to Protect Yourself

Better lighting makes you sharper, safer, and less tired at the end of the shift. Report Poor Lighting in Your Work Area If your work area is too dim, has burned-out bulbs, flickering lights, or glare problems, report it — don't just adapt to it. Workers get so used to bad conditions that they stop noticing them, but their performance suffers the whole time.

Give Your Eyes Regular Breaks – For close-up or screen-based work, follow the 20-20-20 rule: every 20 minutes, look at something at least 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds. It sounds simple, but it genuinely reduces eye strain over the course of a shift. If your job doesn't allow regular breaks from close work, mention it to your supervisor.

Know the Signs of Visual Fatigue - Headaches, burning or watery eyes, blurred vision, increased sensitivity to light, and difficulty focusing are all signs your eyes are working too hard. If you notice these symptoms during your shift, don't push through. Step away from the task, rest your eyes, and let your supervisor know. If these symptoms happen regularly at work, they need to be investigated — they're your body telling you something in your environment needs to change.

Final Word

Your eyes are one of your most important safety tools on the job. Take care of them. Report bad lighting, give yourself breaks, and don't ignore the signs that your eyes are struggling. A workplace that's well-lit is a workplace where people can see what's coming.

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Safety Talk

Worker Mobility: Temporary Staff, Multi-Site Work and Consistent Safety Meeting Kit

Moving between job sites or starting a new assignment means you're stepping into a space with its own rules, its own hazards, and its own way of doing things. What kept you safe last week might not be enough this week.

What's the Danger

Whether you're a temp worker, a floater, or someone covering another location, mobility comes with a hidden risk: the assumption that you already know what you need to know.

Every Site Is Different

Emergency exits, first aid stations, and muster points change from site to site. Chemical storage, restricted areas, and equipment may be in completely different places. Procedures that work at one site might not apply or might even be wrong at another.

Missing Site-Specific Training

Orientation at one location doesn't cover everything at the next one. Gaps in training are often invisible until something goes wrong.

Fatigue From Constant Adjustment

Constantly adapting to new environments, new procedures, and new teams is mentally tiring. Tired minds miss things and miss things lead to incidents.

No Familiar Faces to Lean On

- You may not know who to go to when something feels unsafe
- Building trust with a new team takes time
- In the meantime, you might hesitate to speak up when you should

- Temporary or new workers often feel like asking questions makes them look bad.

How to Protect Yourself

Every new site deserves a fresh set of eyes and a fresh set of questions.

Before you start any work at a new site, ask for a walkthrough. You need to know where the emergency exits are, where first aid is located, what the muster point is, and who your go-to person is when something goes wrong. This isn't being difficult it's the minimum you need to work safely.

Ask Questions — Every Time, Every Site

- There is no such thing as a dumb safety question at a new location.
- Ask how procedures work here, not just how they worked at your last site.
- Ask who to call, where things are, and what to do if something goes wrong.
- The workers who ask the most questions in the first few days are usually the safest ones on the team.

Report Hazards You Notice

Fresh eyes are a real advantage. Long-time workers sometimes stop noticing hazards they've walked past a hundred times. If something looks wrong or unsafe to you even if nobody else seems concerned — say something. New workers have spotted hazards that prevented serious incidents.

Final Word

No matter where the work takes you, your safety habits go with you. A new site doesn't mean starting from scratch, it means adding what you already know to what you're about to learn.

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Training

Why Safety Training Cannot Stop With Frontline Employees

The employee at the machine receives guarding training. The maintenance technician receives lockout training. The driver receives defensive-driving training. The construction worker receives fall-protection training. The warehouse employee receives lifting instruction. When something goes wrong, the first question is often whether the worker was trained.



But long before that worker encountered the hazard, other people made decisions that shaped the exposure. Someone selected the equipment. Someone specified the layout. Someone approved the production target. Someone chose the contractor. Someone compressed the schedule. Someone selected the material. Someone designed the maintenance access. Someone promised the customer a delivery date.

Those people may never enter the hazardous area, yet their decisions can make safe work easier, harder or sometimes nearly impossible. If safety training focuses only on the employee closest to the hazard, organizations are training at the end of the risk chain rather than at the beginning.

Frontline safety training teaches people to work safely inside the system. Upstream safety training teaches decision-makers to create a safer system in the first place.

The Upstream Safety Gap

Traditional safety programs are often excellent at downstream controls. They train workers, write procedures, provide PPE, conduct inspections and supervise behaviour. Those activities matter. The problem is that many

hazards were shaped before any of those controls became necessary.

NIOSH's Prevention through Design approach addresses exactly this issue. It promotes a proactive approach that includes safety measures in the design of work equipment, tools, operations and spaces, and emphasizes addressing hazards during early planning and design. In simple terms, the earlier a hazard can be eliminated or minimized, the less the organization has to depend on workers managing it correctly every day.

That suggests a training question many organizations have not asked: Have we trained the people whose decisions create the work?

Who Creates the Work?

The answer is broader than engineers. Procurement teams select equipment, chemicals, vehicles and vendors. Project managers determine sequencing, contractor interfaces and site logistics. Schedulers influence shift patterns, maintenance windows and workload. Sales teams make delivery and scope commitments. HR and workforce planners influence staffing, onboarding and fatigue exposure. Senior leaders establish priorities, incentives and resource trade-offs.

Each of these decisions can change safety exposure, even when the person making the decision never encounters the hazard directly.

Procurement, for example, can quietly alter the risk profile of an entire operation. A replacement chemical may require different controls. New gloves may reduce dexterity. A machine may meet production specifications but be difficult to isolate for maintenance. A replacement part may require a different service procedure.

Procurement staff do not need to become industrial hygienists or engineers. They do need enough safety literacy to recognize when a purchasing decision should trigger technical review. The same principle applies to scheduling, project management, contractor selection and commercial commitments.

Time is a Safety Control

A scheduler may never wear a hard hat, yet scheduling choices can affect fatigue, task overlap, contractor congestion and the time available for maintenance.

A safe eight-hour shutdown compressed into four hours does not simply create a productivity challenge. It changes the conditions under which people make decisions. Multiple trades booked into the same area, chronic overtime, rapidly rotating shifts or shortened maintenance windows can all create predictable safety problems. Time is a control resource. When a schedule removes the time required to perform a control correctly, the schedule has changed the risk.

Project managers face a similar challenge. Many serious events occur at interfaces: contractor and host employer, pedestrian and vehicle, maintenance and production, or one trade working above another. Upstream training should teach project managers to

identify these interfaces, understand changing conditions and clarify who has authority to stop or resequence work.

Engineering Can Eliminate What Training Can Only Manage

This is the clearest Prevention through Design example. If a hazard can be eliminated through design, the organization no longer has to rely on every worker remembering, every supervisor enforcing and every shift maintaining a lower-level control indefinitely.

Instead of asking how to train workers to avoid a pinch point, ask whether the pinch point can be guarded or eliminated. Instead of focusing only on lockout compliance, ask whether isolation points can be made accessible, obvious and practical to use. Instead of training workers to manage awkward lifting, ask whether the material, package, lift height or handling equipment can be redesigned.

Training remains necessary, but the design question should come first whenever the organization has meaningful control over the source of exposure.

Build An Upstream Safety Culture

The goal is not to turn every purchasing decision or project meeting into a safety review. Organizations can define thresholds for when technical input is required: new chemicals, new equipment, changed guarding, compressed schedules, unfamiliar contractors, significant process changes or decisions that alter energy, materials, staffing or work interfaces.

Safety training can then give non-safety functions a simple framework: define the work, eliminate hazards first, sequence safely, identify interfaces, provide adequate resources and notice downstream consequences.

Fatality Files

Compressed Air & Pneumatics: Hidden Blast and Impact Hazards

What Happened - A 33-year-old carpenter died from head injuries after a pneumatic framing nail gun discharged unexpectedly during a house framing job. He was reattaching an entry wall in an awkward position, holding the nail gun with his non-dominant hand pointed back toward his own body, with no eye protection or hard hat. The gun's factory sequential trigger had been swapped for a contact trigger, which fires any time the tip is pressed. The tool struck a wall stud and discharged unintentionally, sending a nail into his eye socket. He collapsed shortly after telling coworkers to call for help and died days later in the hospital.

What Went Wrong - The safer sequential trigger had been deliberately replaced with a contact trigger, doubling the risk of unintended discharge. No eye protection or hard hat was worn. No accident prevention program, training, or PPE enforcement existed at the worksite. The same employer had been cited for identical violations at a different location back in 2010 — and the conditions were never corrected. MIOSHA issued Serious, Repeat Serious, and Regulatory citations following the investigation.

The Bottom Line - A safety feature was removed from the tool. A worker stood in the line of fire with no protection. No training or oversight caught it in time. Pneumatic tools are high-energy systems — every modification, missed PPE step, or skipped safety procedure can be the one that costs a life.

Source: <https://oem.msu.edu>

Housekeeping Matters: Clean Floors, Clear Aisles, Safer Workplace

What Happened - For years, OSHA investigators repeatedly found the same conditions inside Dollar General stores across the United States: aisles blocked by rolling carts, emergency exits buried behind merchandise, and fire extinguishers inaccessible behind stacked inventory. Workers navigated these hazards every shift. In 2023, a gunman entered a Dollar General store in Jacksonville, Florida and opened fire, killing three people. Security footage showed a maze of metal carts, towering containers, and cluttered product piles obstructing exit routes, and OSHA opened a fatality and catastrophe investigation, citing federal laws against blocked exits and congested walkways as a factor.

What Went Wrong - The hazards were known, documented, and ignored. OSHA's own regional administrator had warned in writing that "seconds lost trying to move boxes to reach a fire extinguisher or get out a safety exit can be the difference between life and death in an emergency." Despite over \$21 million in proposed penalties across more than 240 inspections since 2017, the same housekeeping failures kept appearing.

The Bottom Line - As part of a \$12 million OSHA settlement in 2024, Dollar General was required to ensure emergency exits had clear paths, aisles were unobstructed, and inventory was stacked safely — measures that should have been standard practice from day one. Cluttered aisles and blocked exits are not a minor inconvenience. They are a documented, life-threatening hazard.

Source: <https://www.dol.gov/>