

Safety Matters

Brought to you by: Sinclair Risk & Financial Management

Stop-work Authority Explained

It's everyone's responsibility to detect workplace hazards and prevent accidents. Our stop-work authority (SWA) program is in place to encourage employees to keep an eye out for potential workplace safety hazards. This article discusses what SWA is, who has SWA and the six-step SWA process.

What Is SWA?

SWA programs provide employees with both the responsibility and obligation to stop working if they recognize a perceived unsafe behavior or condition in the workplace. From there, employees must halt work processes until the problem has been corrected.

Who Has SWA?

Every employee within our organization has SWA. We want our employees to feel comfortable and empowered to call out unsafe work conditions or hazardous behaviors of coworkers, vendors or anyone else on the job. In order for SWA to be successful, total participation is required.

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It's important for employees to understand that there will be no punishment or retaliation for reporting unsafe work conditions. Anyone has the ability to question the safety of another person's actions in the workplace, regardless of seniority or discipline. In addition, all supervisors actively support the SWA program, take all safety concerns seriously and will work to address any issues that are brought to their attention.

Employees should know from initial and ongoing training how to recognize unsafe work behavior and conditions, including:

- Violations of OSHA safety standards or organizational safety policies
- Inadequate or lack of training, including the need for remedial and ongoing instruction
- Inadequate, damaged or improperly used equipment
- Fire hazards
- Fall hazards
- Near-miss incidents

What Is the Procedure for SWA?

Now that we've discussed some of the unsafe conditions that may necessitate the need to engage the SWA program, we can break down the procedural steps involved. SWA programs typically follow this six-step process:

1. **Stop the unsafe work.** First, the employee(s) that recognizes unsafe conditions or behaviors must initiate a stop-work intervention with anyone who could potentially be at risk. Affected employees should stop working and call attention to the perceived safety hazard at hand.
2. **Notify a supervisor.** A supervisor should be informed of the stop-work intervention.
3. **Investigate the issue.** The SWA initiator, affected employees and supervisor should discuss the condition or behavior in question and come to an agreement on whether it is safe or unsafe.
4. **Fix the problem.** In the event that the condition or behavior is deemed unsafe, the problem must be fixed according to the modifications or corrections suggested in the stop-work issuance form.
5. **Resume work.** Once the problem has been fixed, all affected employees, contractors and supervisors must be briefed on why a stop-work intervention occurred and what corrective actions or modifications were made. From there, work operations can resume.
6. **Conduct follow-ups.** After the problem has been resolved and work resumes, management will review all stop-work documentation to identify any need for further investigation or follow-up. The SWA incident will be published and distributed to all employees, detailing corrective actions taken and lessons learned.

Conclusion

Our SWA program is intended to keep the working environment safe. Supervisors are available to help with any questions or concerns about SWA procedures. They have been trained on this program and will be glad to help employees through the process when issues arise.

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