

# Home Safety

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**It would be a sad situation to be fully prepared for Armageddon and then die because of a simple home hazard or unsafe habit.**

As a Certified Hazard Control Manager with over 25-years of experience in industrial safety management, I have developed and implemented hundreds of safety programs and systems. At one time it was assumed that “accidents happen” and that from ten to thirty percent injury rates could be *normal* for some jobs. In fact, all accidents are preventable. I have been able to reduce injury rates to less than one percent. Employees work millions of hours year after year without a significant injury. The great majority of injuries and deaths today are not job related or caused by disasters or terrorists. Most unnecessary injuries and deaths happen in the home or on the streets. Obviously, basic home safety must come even before home emergency preparedness. It would be a sad situation to be fully prepared for Armageddon and then die because of a simple home hazard or unsafe habit. No one can keep you safe but you. In industry it has been found that engineering and safety programs can only go so far in reducing injuries. As long as the employees believed that their safety was the responsibility of the company or “the safety guy” injuries continued to happen. Only when they accepted responsibility for their own safety and adopted safety principals into their daily routines did the great safety record become achieved. Even as we prepare for future disasters, we must first assure safety in our homes and in our daily lives. The individual and family can use the same principals and techniques as industry does to reduce risks. Let’s look at some of these methods as they would apply to personal safety.

## **What is an Accident?**

There are many definitions of an accident but the most common one is “an unplanned and uncontrollable event that has negative consequences” By this definition there are very few true “accidents”. \* We may not *plan* to have an accident but in most cases we had control of one or more of the causes. For Example: You roll through a Stop sign at an intersection that has little traffic but today you get broad sided by a truck. Was that an accident? Your house burns down because of a leaking gas-can in your basement. Was it an accidental fire? They were unplanned but they were not uncontrollable (by you) so they were not true accidents. They were the result of choices you made. You were in the habit of saving time by rolling through that Stop sign. You did not replace an old fuel can and you chose to store a flammable inside the house.

## **Hazard Recognition**

It is very easy to overlook hazardous conditions and unsafe habits as we go about our daily lives. Our parents may have told us “don’t go looking for trouble” and our nature is

to focus in what we are doing. We may not recognize a hazard because we cannot actually see it or because we lack the technical information needed, but the great majority of hazards and unsafe habits are visible and recognizable to anyone with common sense. Think! I cannot count the times that an injury victim said, "I knew that was going to happen". Subconsciously they recognized the hazard but kept doing it until they got hurt. Look for hazards, Think about your actions, **listen to your safety consciousness.**

### **Near Miss Incidents**

In theory there are 300 near misses and about 30 small injuries before a serious injury or death occur from any hazard or unsafe habit. Each (almost!) near miss incident is a warning and an opportunity to fix the problem or change the habit before it gets you. For example: You almost tripped on that loose carpet on the stairs, or you almost fell off that old rickety ladder. Do you keep going and forget the event or do you make sure to put correcting these hazards on the top of your "to do list" **Never ignore a near miss incident or something that looks wrong. Fix it now or be sure to do it ASAP!**

### **Unsafe Acts vs. Unsafe Conditions**

Unsafe conditions such as broken steps, or worn electrical cords are dangerous and must be corrected but **the great majority (90%) of all injuries and deaths are the result of unsafe acts of people.** A spill on the kitchen floor that is not cleaned up is *not* an "unsafe condition" it was the act of whoever spilled it and did not clean it up. The batteries taken out of the smoke detector was an act. Letting combustibles pile up near the furnace is an act. Unsafe driving is an act. Think! Examine your habits for potential risk taking.

### **Unsafe Habits**

One of the most common sentences I hear from accident victims is "I've been doing it that way for years" We develop our habits based on the immediate rewards we get for our acts. If we do it and we get any kind of small and immediate reward we tend to continue doing it. The reward can be saving a few seconds, using less energy, or saving a few cents. The immediate reward has much more impact than any potential long-term dangers. Cigarettes provide an immediate reward (good feeling) and become a habit in spite of the horrible long term dangers. The driver who rolls through the Stop sign at the deserted intersections and is rewarded by getting to work early will keep doing it until --. Safety glasses and gloves are uncomfortable; reading the labels on insecticides takes time. Fire extinguishers cost money you could spend on DVDs. This is human nature that can get people hurt. **Get in the habit of thinking about the long-term results of your habits and correct those that are dangerous to your health and safety**

### **What If Analysis**

Most accidents happen when several unsafe conditions (you didn't fix) and unsafe habits (you didn't change) come together. For Example: You are in the habit of wearing flip-flops on the stairs and you never fixed that worn carpeting there, or you are in the habit of walking to your car without looking around and today there is a mugger in the parking lot. **It is not paranoid to look through your daily actions and your environment (home, work, road, etc.) and ask "what if?"** What if there is a car-jacker

at the corner? What if a train is coming? what if this gas can leaks?, what if my hand slips?, etc. This is called a “questioning attitude” and it can save your life.

### **Management of Change**

Even in a fairly safe environment, changes can result in disaster. In fact many of history's greatest disasters were caused by unmanaged changes meeting unsafe acts or conditions. Icebergs are an unsafe condition, going too fast was an unsafe act; the Titanic had a changed rate of turn. You may be in the habit of backing out of your driveway without looking but the school schedule has changed today and there are children running for the bus. **If you are correcting unsafe acts and conditions, you are 90% safe but watch out for changes.** Any kind of changes in weather, schedules, routs, people, the building, hobbies, etc. can bring new hazards. What was safe before may now have risk. Think!

### **Safety Inspections**

After teaching the above safety principals I often sent a supervisor into the workplace to do a focused safety inspection. They usually return amazed at the number of unsafe conditions and unsafe acts they discovered. They may have thought they were “watching out” for safety but they actually had become used to seeing these conditions and acts without recognizing them. The same is true in the home and away from home. There are many safety checklist available but these are not as effective as developing your own. **The key is that you need to spend time focused on safety observation.**

### **Safety Rules (does and don'ts)**

In your life you are not going to have a safety guy” standing around enforcing safety rules. You have to make your own and you (YOU) have to maintain them yourself.

**Remember that most accidents are caused by unsafe acts that you control.**

Having recognized your unsafe habits, make a list of does and don'ts. For example: Don't leave doors unlocked, Do turn on the lights before going in, Don't stand on chairs, Do remove fuses and check for current flow before working on electrical wires, Don't leave loaded firearms out. Etc. etc.

### **Root Causes**

When you recognize a hazard, even if no injury occurred ask why three times. Just fixing the immediate hazard may not be enough. There is probably a deeper cause for the unsafe condition or unsafe act that should be addressed. For example: You find your child playing with drain cleaner. Fortunately you get it away from him in time and place it on a high shelf. That takes care if the immediate danger but why was the drain cleaner available? The answer may be that you keep lots of chemicals under the sink. Why are chemicals under the sink? Maybe because you are not thinking about what a child could get into. Now you go about and find all kinds of poisons, matches, etc. that need to be locked up or removed. This “why?why? why? Can lead you to the root cause of many kinds of problems and provide an opportunity for real improvements. **The root cause of most unsafe acts and unsafe conditions usually lies in someone's attitude.**

### **Unsafe Mental States**

This casual factor in accidents and injuries only became a part of safety science in recent years.

- Example: John is the best truck driver in the company with an outstanding record. Today he backed his trailer into another one in the trailer yard. Why? Yesterday his wife was diagnosed with cancer.
- Example: Mary has run the same machine for many years without incident, but today she forgets to lock-out the drive before opening the guard. Why: She had a fight with her husband before coming to work. Sound familiar?

Unsafe mental states are the result of frustration, fatigue, heat, cold, pain, fear, and anger. These in turn cause you to be in a hurry, take shortcuts, miss details, lose your temper and make poor decisions.

Being aware of the causes and effects of unsafe mental states can prevent bad situations from turning into disasters. You may chose not to perform a hazardous task or drive a vehicle until you feel in control. If you must do what you must do, being aware of an unsafe mental state can make you extra cautious and step-by-step double check what you are doing.

**These kinds of accidents are of special importance to survivalists because any kind of emergency situation or disaster will automatically trigger unsafe mental states that can easily lead to further injuries and harm. You are already nervous, stressed, angry, fatigued, cold, hot, frustrated and in a rush, and now you are fueling a generator, using an ax, patching your roof, driving through traffic, etc.**

### **Conclusion**

**Statistically, 80% of home and road accidents happen to 20% of the population.** That is not “bad luck” it is lack of awareness and poor safety habits. Safety habits and survival capabilities are parallel human characteristics. Just like emergency preparedness, your safety is up to you. The above principals are used by safety professionals and (more importantly) safe workers to achieve outstanding safety records. They can do the same for you and your family. **Think about safety.**

*\* That said, I will use the term “accident” here for any kind of negative event.*