

For Your Safety: Jokes Can Hurt

Don't pull chairs out from under people. Don't jump on the couch. No running in the house. No wrestling and no rough-housing. There were rules against horseplay when you were a child, and there are rules in your workplace today.

Horseplay (rough play or pranks) is forbidden at work for the same reasons that it was frowned upon at home and in school when you were young: somebody could get hurt. Rough play endangers you, your co-workers and even members of the public.

One reason horseplay persists is that it makes a good story. Many of us have been entertained during the lunch break with tales of practical jokes. They get funnier with each telling until they become workplace legends. Even a safety meeting about horseplay can easily become a forum for telling these stories once again.

Horseplay story sessions don't usually include jokes gone wrong — the worker was actually run down by the forklift driver pretending to do so or the person fell from a ladder when someone shook it. The stories do not recognize the embarrassment and humiliation of the victim of a gag.

Here are a few examples of actual workplace jokes gone wrong:

- Setting fire to a safety manual another worker is reading. She drops it and a fire burns out of control.
- Taking the grapple crane for a joy ride down the road and not seeing the high voltage power lines located above the driveway.
- Tripping someone walking by. This time the injured person is the practical joker, who takes a punch in the face from the intended victim.

Laughter is good for everyone but it shouldn't be from doing something unsafe or making someone feel like they are the butt of the joke.

This e-mail was produced by the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, Inc. For more information, visit us on the Web at www.ISRI.org
For comments or suggestions about *For Your Safety*, e-mail barneyboynton@isri.org

August 29, 2006