

TerranearPMC Safety Share

Week of January 4, 2016 – Electronic Distractions

It happened on Christmas Day, when a 33-year-old man from Indiana was visiting Southern California. He was in San Diego, at a place known as Sunset Cliffs. As the name implies, this location is a place where many go to watch the sun set as it gently disappears in the horizon, just beyond the ocean. This is a daily event and always attracts both tourists and locals. However, also as the name implies, Sunset Cliffs rises above the beach; and in some places, 100 feet above the sand. If you are not aware of your immediate surroundings, one can come dangerously close to the edge. Apparently, that is what happened to this Indiana man. It seems he was so intent on getting a *Selfie* with his Smart Phone, he did not notice that he was at the cliff's edge when he unknowingly took one step too many and fell to his death.

Hazard Awareness: this is not just concept that needs to be applied in occupational settings. It is something we all need to practice at all times-whether at work, play or just enjoying a scenic walk. Hazard awareness is a major concept that many businesses incorporate into New Hire Orientation. This is because *Zero Accident Philosophy* – the belief that all accidents are preventable – hinges on the initial stage of the identification of hazards. Once a hazard has been identified, we can apply an appropriate control. In the case of the unassuming tourist at Sunset Cliffs, one can only surmise that he did not perceive the cliff edge as a hazard. Without a doubt, he probably noticed the edge, but did not think he was in harm's way. After all, what are the chances that one would not be cognizant of such a hazard as a steep drop-off point leading to a rocky shoreline? So while this visitor noticed the cliff, he probably did not perceive this as something he needed to show caution and therefore, ignored the probability of any type of negative consequence.

We all need to be aware of our surroundings and to recognize potential hazard scenarios. Talking on cell phones or taking pictures (including *Selfies*) seem to be social activities that will not fade or diminish as if this was some kind of fad (remember hula-hoops, tops, yo-yos?). Cell phones are here and taking pictures with these electronic devices will only get more popular while technology will lead the way to make such activities even more acceptable. So it seems that the least we can do, is understand the pros and cons of using these gadgets – this includes knowing when to use them and when to put them in your pocket and wait to use them during a more appropriate moment.

Thought to ponder: No woman will in my time be Prime Minister

Margaret Thatcher (1969-10 years before being elected prime minister)

