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Toolbox Talk – Listening Safety on Jobsites

Date _____ **Company Name** _____
Supervisor _____ **Job Name** _____

Every construction site is filled with sounds. These sounds come from tools, machinery, materials, and the environment. The sounds will vary depending on the setting and project, but nearly every contractor can identify the “normal” sounds of a worksite, given enough time and experience. With alert listening skills, your workers can learn to identify the signs of a hazard – whether this be the breakdown of an electrical tool, or an approaching thunderstorm.

When we teach about being alert for danger, we typically rely on our sense of sight. However, with focused awareness, sound can prove to be a wonderful sensory tool for spotting danger.

Guidelines for Discussion

If you are a contractor, you should be using all of your senses for monitoring the safety of your worksite. Today, we are focusing on the sense of sound. There are a series of normal sounds within a worksite that we all become accustomed to – these sounds provide a sense of normalcy and routine. The sounds of a worksite come from our tools, machinery, materials, and environment. If we notice when these sounds change from their normal patterns, we can locate the problem and make changes to prevent an accident or injury.

Next time you are at your worksite, pay careful attention to the sounds of the site.

- What do your tools sound like? Are you working with electrical tools, air tools, etc.?
- What do your machines (vehicles, etc.) sound like?
- What is the normal volume of conversations? Do people usually shout in your worksite, speak one-on-one, or is there little conversation?
- What does the environment sound like? Are you near heavy traffic, in a remote location, near a certain population of wild animals, etc.? What does the weather normally sound like?

Once you make a catalogue in your brain of all the normal sounds, you can better discern when something abnormal occurs. For instance, if you work with a relatively quiet electrical drill, you can tell that something is wrong if it suddenly begins loudly whirring or sputtering when in use. If you work in a social environment and are used to a steady flow of chatter from your supervisor, you could be alerted to a problem if the worksite is silent.

There are also things that will decrease your capacity to listen for safety:

- Over concentration on work – if you are too focused on the task you are performing, you lose touch with whatever is happening around you.
- Lack of sleep – if you are tired, all of your senses suffer.
- Improper eating habits – without the right fuel, all of your senses suffer.
- Loud radios or headphones – music can drown out the other sounds within your environment.

Become acquainted with the normal operational sounds of your equipment and machines. Listen closely to the instructions of your supervisor, and take care of yourself so that you come to work with each sense operating at full capacity.

Additional Discussion Notes:

At the end of the discussion, go over your company's radio/headphone policy with your employees. Are they allowed to listen to music on the job? Are they allowed to wear headphones or earbuds when working?

Safety Recommendations

Job Specific Topics

Attendees

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