



Safety Message of the Day for IMEA Members

COMMON SENSE
is not that **COMMON.**

MARK TWAIN



Is Safety Common Sense?

How often do we hear in the workplace that safety is just common sense? If safety is common sense, then, to quote Mark Twain, "Common sense is not that common." If it were so common, there would be a lot fewer serious injuries and fatalities. In fact, it is well established there is no such thing as "common sense" and all such "sense" is actually learned.

Implying that safety is common sense relegates it to those areas in our life that don't require much thought or close attention. It relegates it to a category of thinking we might call "mindlessness." I think it is fair to say we all know otherwise. When we treat safety as common sense we make it a mindless act.

Safety will in fact become common sense when all employees are able to perceive risks when they arise, understand the consequences of exposure to the risks and make timely decisions to not tolerate any risk that is inconsistent with the corporate risk posture. Considering this, we would say the majority of occupational health and safety practice is not common sense; rather, it is actually just good sense.

Good sense requires competence. About 80 per cent of industrial accidents are caused by unsafe acts on the part of employees — and not by unsafe conditions. The focus needs to be on building employee competence. The goal is not to develop common sense; rather, it is to seek competence. A "competent person" is one who is capable of identifying existing and predictable hazards in the surroundings or working conditions that are unsanitary, hazardous or dangerous to employees, and who has authorization to take prompt corrective measures to eliminate them.