

Extreme precautions: What are yours?

Written by Shawn M. Galloway
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As a frequent traveler, I perceive a clear day to typically be a good day for flying. However, it was not the case one day when I was unaware of a large weather band just outside of Houston, Texas, my starting point. We took off on time. We easily reached 15,000 miles (24,140 kilometers) which is the altitude where many commercial airlines typically sound the bell stating it is safe to use specified electronic devices, in “airplane mode” of course. Many of us waited for the second bell that indicates the disengagement of the seatbelt warning, which is typically sounded by the pilots once reaching cruising altitude with a smooth ride. We continued to wait.

We experienced heavy turbulence throughout most of the three-hour flight. The pilot was finally able to turn off the “Fasten Seatbelt” sign, though only for a short time. This was a wise move, as the passengers were becoming very restless. It was evident in the body language of many, who uncomfortably shifted in their seats and longingly stared towards the plane’s lavatories.

Up and about the risky environment

Karen, the head flight attendant, spoke over the loudspeaker, “Ladies and Gentlemen, the pilot has turned off the Fasten Seatbelt sign. We are sorry for the delay. Due to the heavy turbulence, it was not safe to do so until this time. As we could continue to experience light turbulence, I ask that you please use extreme precautions when you are up and about the cabin.”

Extreme precautions when you are doing what is necessary, I believed that to be a great phrase. When we work at our jobs, we do what is necessary. What are the extreme precautions taken? What extreme precautions do we take? Based on your company’s work type and past safety performance, what extreme precautions should your employees take? Even further, based on your community’s local safety incidents, which ones are vital in and around the home?

Applying flying to fieldwork

It has been a little over three years since I flew on that memorable flight. Shortly after that trip, I began to ask the people I worked with, “There are precautions we all know to take to keep ourselves injury-free in our day-to-day jobs; site-wide, which ones do you feel would fall into the category of extreme precautions, and why?”

I applied this question in every major industry and at sites that could be classified as above average to excellent in safety. I found it was common at any single location, 50 workers would give 15 different answers. When I asked about off-the-job safety exposure, the response variance was even greater.

This profound insight made me think. Workers are now focusing on precautions that they

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believe will be the biggest opportunity in minimizing their exposure to risk at work and while away. Certainly, this is desirable since the employer is responsible for the environment, and the employee for their own safety. The undesirable part is that all employees do not all agree on the focus. Who is correct? Or, is anyone particularly correct for that matter?

Determining the focus of extreme precautions

If you asked your workers to pay special attention to one thing this month in safety at work, what would it be? Unlike individuals responsible for safety data, most workers do not get the “big picture information.” Most tend to get information presented to them one event at a time or by numbers (frequency, cost, rates, etc.) only which, if cumulative, most people will not remember.

When people are proud of something they have learned or accomplished, they have a desire to share. Some share for bragging purposes, others share because it is viewed as useful to them, so they believe it must be for others as well. This holds true for information obtained at work. Think of the last thing you learned at work that was safety-related that made its way home and was shared by you to your family. If you draw a blank, why is that? If something immediate comes to mind, again, why is that?

If we have a yearning for people to take precautions that we know will help them remain injury-free and safe throughout life, caring alone simply doesn't do it. We must provide information that is interesting, portable and facilitates sharing. What strategies, based on your site, country and community accident data, can be developed and provided to your workforce to ensure that extreme precautions are taken at the right times? This is a challenge worth taking — a challenge with unknown predetermined precautions, which makes it even more worthwhile.

Shawn M. Galloway is the president of ProAct Safety, an international safety excellence consulting firm. As an author, speaker and expert business-safety strategist, he has assisted hundreds of organizations to achieve and sustain excellence in safety, culture and operational performance. Shawn is the host of the COS video series, [Culture Shock](#), and the weekly podcast series, [Safety Culture Excellence](#). He can be reached at 936-273-8700 or info@ProActSafety.com.