HORSEPLAY... IT'S NOT ALL FUN AND GAMES

Horseplay has many different names. Messing around, goofing around, pulling pranks, and playing around are different terms we use to describe an attitude or behavior we’ve experienced since we met our first class clown in grade school. While horseplay might be considered by some as entertaining, it can pose a serious threat to safety in a work environment.

But why do some people need to fool around in a work environment? For some, it’s a way to alleviate boredom; for others it’s a way to alleviate stress. Although the reasons may differ as to why someone behaves this way, the consequences tend to be the same. People get hurt.

Throwing things, putting foreign objects in others’ shoes, or wrestling in the change room are examples of horseplay which all of us have experienced.

While some pranks or practical jokes might be considered harmless by the prankster, it’s really the target of the prank who defines what is funny and what is hurtful.

At the very least, all pranks are byproducts of not focusing on the job at hand. Their attention is elsewhere. What’s worse, they often distract others from the jobs they are performing. Not paying attention to your job or your surrounding environment creates a dangerous situation where injuries can occur.

Even the most harmless prank can distract you for a second and cost someone a serious injury. Every year young people are injured during horseplay. Some lose eyes, get hit in the head with flying objects, while others die from their injuries. While the prankster thought it was all in fun, the target is the one who suffers.

Ignoring pranks is a smart way to encourage a prankster to stop. The best way, however, is to report it. This will give the supervisor an opportunity to discuss the effects of horsing around in the workplace with the prankster. This is a sure way to eliminate the chance of an injury.

Although you might consider reporting someone as “ratting them out”, consider that most shops have limits to how much fooling around they will accept. Nipping the prank in the bud is not only a safety prevention strategy, it might save the person his job.

Remember to look past the humor when others start horsing around. Recognize that it poses a dangerous threat to all. What might be funny today could easily be tomorrow’s tragedy. Make sure the joke is not on you.