



# National Council for Occupational Safety and Health

Leading the Fight for Safe and Healthy Workplaces!  
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## Workplace Safety Dialogues for use in English as a Second Language classes

### Dialogue 1

John: Hi, Maria. How are you? How was English class today?

Maria: Hi, John. I'm fine. English class was interesting. A woman came to speak to us about the law. Do you know there is a law in the United States that says the places where we work must be safe.

John: Safe? But many jobs I see are not safe—they are dangerous.

Maria: Yes, but the boss must protect workers from danger at work.

John: My boss is very busy. He does not have time to protect me.  
I take care of myself.

Maria: It is true—you have to be careful, but the boss also has responsibilities.  
He must teach you about dangers at work and he must be sure you have the right equipment to protect yourself.

John: Does my boss know about these responsibilities?

Maria: He should. It is the law. All employers have responsibilities.

### vocabulary

1. law
2. safe/safety
3. dangerous/danger
4. protect
5. employer
6. employee
7. responsibilities

### ...and for discussion...

1. Name some laws that you know. Are they good? bad?
2. What does the law say about safety at work?
3. Is this law good? bad? why?
4. Name some responsibilities that you have.
5. What do workers have to do about safety?
6. What do employers have to do about safety?

## Dialogue 2

John: Hi, Maria. I am so glad to see you. I got a new job in a factory.  
The pay is very good!

Maria: Congratulations! But John, is it a safe place to work?

John: I think so.

Maria: Did your supervisor talk to you about safety?

John: No, but don't worry. I will be OK.

Maria: Do you remember what we talked about? Your boss has responsibilities about safety.

John: The boss has many workers who do not speak English.  
Some workers do not have papers. He pays good money—he does not have to do anything else. He does not have to protect us from danger.

Maria: No, John. You are wrong. All workers have rights. All people who work have the right to a safe workplace.

## vocabulary

1. safety
2. protect
3. protection
4. rights

## ... and for discussion ...

1. Name some rights that you have.
2. Do all people have the same rights?
3. Do people who do not speak English have rights at work?
4. Do people without papers have rights at work?

### **Dialogue 3**

John: Hi, Maria. I'm glad to see you. I have a question.

Maria: You can ask me anything. I hope I have the answer.

John: You told me my boss has to give us a safe workplace. Is this really true?

Maria: Yes it is. Is there a problem at you work? Is there danger?

John: I am not sure. There are many machines. I can see I must be careful around my machine because it is very powerful.

Maria: Your boss has to make sure the machines operate safely. He should show you how to work safely. Does he do these things?

John: Not really. He speaks English very fast. I did not have any questions for him. My English is not very good.

Maria: This is bad news. Do you remember what we talked about? Your boss needs to give you information about such dangers or hazards.

### **Vocabulary**

1. machines
2. information
3. hazards
4. training

### **... and for discussion ...**

1. How can an employer protect workers?
2. How can an employer give workers information?
3. Did you have any training at your job? What kind of training?
4. How can an employer help workers understand if they do not speak the same language?

## Dialogue 4

John: Hi, Maria. Something bad happened at work this week.

Maria: What is it?

John: Two workers, Mario and Rosa had an accident with one of the machines.

Maria: I hope they are OK. Was it very serious?

John: It was serious, but I think they will be OK. I am afraid the machine is dangerous.

Maria: Do workers still use this machine?

John: Yes, people still work on this machine.

Maria: John, you need to talk to your boss about safety.

John: But Maria, I am nervous.

Maria: Don't worry. I have a friend at an agency. You can talk to him. You can get help.

## vocabulary

1. accident
2. social service agency
3. community agency
4. help

## ... and for discussion ...

1. Have you had an accident at work?
2. Should John's do anything about the machine?
3. Do you have friends at a social service agency? or a community agency?
4. Who else can help you with a problem?
5. Why do you think John is nervous?

## **Dialogue 5**

John: Hi Maria. How are you doing?

Maria: I'm fine. Did my friend at the agency talk with you?

John: Yes. He helped me a lot. He told me that many machines at work are very dangerous and that someone should train the workers to operate them safely. We called OSHA together.

Maria: OSHA? The nice woman who came to my English class works there. I am sure OSHA will help.

John: Yes. They will call my boss and ask what is going on with the machine that Mario and Rosa were hurt on.

Maria: I hope he talks to them.

John: I hope so too.

## **vocabulary**

1. operate
2. OSHA
3. occupational
4. safety
5. health
6. administration

## **... and for discussion ...**

1. Why did the agency call OSHA?
2. Why does OSHA care about John or Mario and Rosa?
3. What will OSHA do about their problem?
4. Will the boss listen to OSHA? Why? Why not?

## **Dialogue 6**

Maria: Hi John. I am very curious. How is your problem at work?

John: The machine that hurt Mario and Rosa is dangerous. The boss did not tell us, but an inspector from OSHA came to the factory.

Maria: Why?

John: It's called an inspection.

Maria: Oh, yes. I remember. A person from OSHA comes to look for dangers. Did he find any?

John: Yes, and he told the boss. There was an electrical hazard and the machine had to have a safety guard.

Maria: Now your boss must fix the problem.

### **vocabulary**

1. inspector
2. inspection
3. electrical
4. guards
5. fix

### **... and for discussion ...**

1. Have you ever seen an inspection? What kind?
2. Why did an inspector come to John's work?
3. What did he find?
4. Why will the boss have to fix the problems?

## Dialogue 7

John: Hi, Maria. Work was great today! The boss told us how to use the new safety guards and he fixed the electrical hazard. Everyone feels safe now.

Maria: Your friends at work must be so happy. Maybe they will give you presents and have a party.

John: No, Maria. You are very wrong. No one at work knows that I talked to OSHA. It was confidential.

Maria: Confidential? What does that mean?

John: It is a secret. OSHA does not use my name when they talk to my boss.

Maria: Oh, I see. Maybe it is better if your boss does not know your name. Will your boss be mad? Will he fire you?

John: Well, the law says my boss should not punish me for complaining to OSHA.

## Vocabulary

1. confidential
2. punish
3. discriminate
4. anonymous

## ... and for discussion ...

1. Does John's boss know that John talked to OSHA?
2. Why does John want to keep the secret? Why is it confidential?
3. Name some other things that are confidential.
4. Can John's boss punish him?

## **Dialogue 8**

Maria: Hi John. You look very good today. You look happy.

John: I am happy. We both learned a lot about the laws in this country.  
The laws can help us. Maria, are you happy with your job? Is it a safe place to work?

Maria: I like my job, but some friends at work are talking about making it a safer place.

John: How will you do that?

Maria: The first thing we will do is talk together.

John: Our friend at the agency talked to me about this. You can form a Health and Safety Committee.

Maria: Yes, that's right. And we will try to make things better.

### **vocabulary**

1. safer
2. group
3. committee
4. improve

### **...and for discussion ...**

1. Why do Maria and her friends want to talk together about work?
2. Would a supervisor/ boss want to listen to a group of workers?

## Training Aid for ELS Instructors

These notes give the instructor some background regarding the topics of the dialogues so the instructor feels comfortable with them and can deal with questions that may arise outside the immediate scope of the dialogues.

### Dialogue 1:

This dialogue refers to the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act a federal law passed in 1970 which protects workers from workplace hazards. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in the U.S. Department of Labor is the agency responsible for the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act.

OSHA has the authority to make rules and standards on health and safety in the workplace. These are legally enforceable by OSHA and failing to comply can result in citations and fines

OSHA inspects work sites to determine if there are hazards and violations of its rules and standards.

OSHA responds to complaints about safety and health.

OSHA issues citations and fines against employers who fail to meet standards or who violate the law.

### Dialogue 2:

Under the OSH law an employer must provide a safe and healthy place to work. This is a fairly strong and broad mandate under the OSH law.

One way the employer has to fulfill this broad responsibility is to explain to employees about recognized hazards in the worksite.

Hazards may be a machine that can crush finger, a grinder that can cause eye injury, electrical hazards, and chemicals that may injure health, or dangers from falls or trips or moving equipment.

### Dialogue 3:

Refers to an OSHA requirement that employers inform workers about recognized hazards *specific to the job or operation workers performs*.

An employer would normally explain the steps on how to operate a machine or some equipment. OSHA requires the employer to explain what *hazards* that particular machine or equipment may cause. And, what is more, that an employer must explain how the worker is protected from these hazards.

Machine hazards include such things as a press that can crush a worker's hand if in the striking zone. A machine may misfire or the workpiece might not be set correctly so a piece can fly out and strike a worker in the face.

The machine may not be properly grounded and cause an electrical shock. The area around the machine may be cluttered leading to trips and falls.

Moving parts of the machine might grab a piece of loose clothing—even hair.

Another set of hazards might involve the oils or lubricants that may be hazardous to inhale or have skin contact with.

Solutions to such hazards might include:

- Machine guards to prevent workers fingers from getting crushed

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- A guard on moving parts to prevent hair or clothing being caught.
- Eye protection
- Housekeeping
- Making sure machine is properly grounded
- Using less toxic oils/lubricants or supplying respirators and chemical protective gloves and aprons, or setting up ventilation on the equipment.

#### **Dialogue 4:**

In this dialogue 2 workers have been injured. Ordinarily in such a case a machine would not continue to be operated until it was determined what happened to cause the injury.

The fact that the machine is still used and that workers are not sure about hazards would make one suspicious that there is a problem.

#### **Dialogue 5:**

When an employee is injured or hurt this should be a clear sign that perhaps there is a hazard involved with the operation. OSHA law is clear that a worker has the right to ask about any hazards and what needs to be done to be protected from them.

But many workers might be afraid to bring this up with their employer, though under the law a worker has the right to do so. And a worker has the right to call OSHA about this. But this, too, can be intimidating especially if the worker is an immigrant.

Community and neighborhood agencies can be a key resource in this circumstance. Just as such organizations may help an immigrant with banking or housing or insurance they may offer a place for an immigrant worker to talk about the work situation in a non-threatening environment. And staff may help get information about rights and rules and safety requirements, and help with making connections to OSHA.

- There are many ways to contact OSHA. In the dialogue the community agency staff member together with the worker contacts OSHA.

A worker can contact OSHA directly, too. In general, if a worker is limited in speaking English it can be hard.

The staff member can contact OSHA. OSHA main responsibility is to workers and it is better if a worker makes contact, but OSHA will accept referrals from outside agencies.

OSHA has a procedure for dealing with inquires and complaints.

In many circumstances OSHA will take the information they have received (from the worker and staffer in our example) and contact the employer by phone/fax or letter. OSHA will explain what they have heard and ask the employer about it. OSHA will not reveal the identity of the worker.

In our example OSHA will question the employer about the machine, about hazards (OSHA will be very familiar with many machine hazards), about protections for workers.

OSHA gives the employer five days to explain and to show that the situation is under control.

Depending on what they hear back, they may decide to inspect the worksite. OR they may close the case without an actual inspection.

(Before they close the case OSHA will ask the worker if what the employer replied is accurate.)

In some cases OSHA may decide the situation is very dangerous they may immediately visit and conduct an official onsite inspection of the worksite.

### **Dialogue 6:**

An OSHA inspection has occurred, i.e. OSHA has arrived at the site talked to the employer, and will talk to workers. (If a worker is afraid to talk to OSHA at the worksite they can talk off the worksite.)

An OSHA inspector will discuss with the employer what hazards they find, and suggest how they can be fixed.

AN official notification of the inspection will be mailed to the employer explaining the hazards, what OSHA standard(s) have been violated and give a date when the situation must be corrected. An employer must post this information.

It is not always easy for worker to understand what is going on if they are not familiar with these OSHA procedures, or that sometimes correcting the problem can take time. It will not hurt to stay involved and call OSHA if there are questions.

### **Dialogue 7:**

A worker can make a complaint and remain anonymous to the employer. OSHA will not reveal to the employer which worker made a complaint if the worker does not wish it.

- OSHA prohibits retaliation against employees who exercise their rights under the OSHAct.

The OSHAct says employers shall not punish or discriminate against workers for exercising rights such as:

Complaining to an employer, union, OSHA or any other government agency about job safety and health hazards;

Participating in OSHA inspections, conferences, hearings, or other OSHA-related activities;

If a worker believes that he/she has been punished for exercising safety and health rights (called a Section 11c violation) a worker has 30 days to contact and notify OSHA that this has happened. If OSHA accepts the case, OSHA acts as the worker's attorney.

However, a worker can be at risk in such situations.

### **Dialogue 8:**

Refers to the development of a health and safety committee

A health and safety committee is one of the best ways to prevent costly injuries at work. Many hazards can be identified and corrected before injuries occur. The safety committee is vital because it is always present in the workplace and because an active safety committee is the agent in the workplace that gives the highest priority to safety.

OSHA does not require such a committee but it sees the presence of a safety committee as a critical factor during inspections.