

# LESSON 8

## Addressing Unsafe Workplace Conditions



### Description:

Students discuss the benefits and drawbacks of worker safety laws and learn the basic steps for addressing workplace safety issues.

### Learner Outcomes:

Students will be able to do the following:

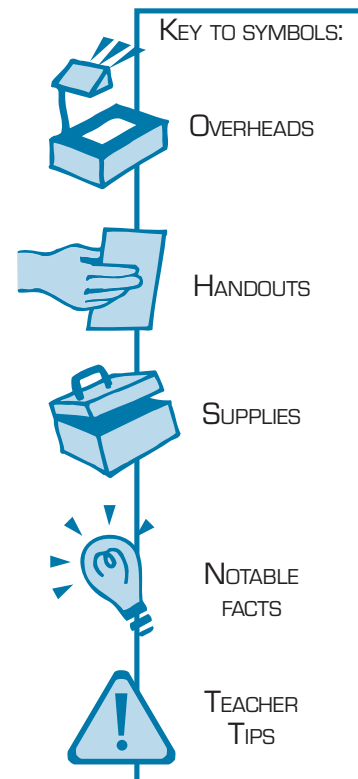
1. Describe the benefits and drawbacks of worker safety laws.
2. Perceive that worker safety laws are important, even though they may be restrictive.
3. Give examples of helpful steps in resolving workplace safety issues.
4. Apply these steps to a worker safety issue.

### Key Concepts:

1. Worker safety laws are meant to protect workers, not to limit their opportunities for employment.
2. Employees can take basic steps to address unsafe work conditions.
3. Every worker has the right and responsibility to address safety concerns in the workplace.

### Fact:

*Most injuries are preventable and, with the right prevention steps, can be avoided.*



## Materials

### Needed:

- Overheads 8.1 and 8.2
- Optional: Photographs used in Lesson 6
- “Teacher’s Key: The Benefits and Drawbacks of Worker Safety Laws”
- “Keep Your Workplace S.A.F.E.” handout (one per student)
- “Teacher’s Key: S.A.F.E. Communication Skills Worksheet”

## Preparation Needed:

1. Review the “Teacher’s Key: The Benefits and Drawbacks of Worker Safety Laws” provided in this lesson. Make sure you are familiar with both the possible benefits and the drawbacks of each law, so you can effectively lead the discussion.
2. Think through how you will apply each of the S.A.F.E. concepts to the role-play suggested in the lesson. Prepare how you would discuss the issue with an employer.
3. Review the “S.A.F.E. Communication Skills Worksheet” and accompanying teacher’s key. Practice transforming the negative statements into positive ones, so you can assist your students, if they have difficulty.
4. Set up the overhead projector and overheads.
5. Photocopy the “S.A.F.E. Communication Skills Worksheet.”

## Directions:

### The Benefits and Drawbacks of Worker Safety Laws (30 minutes)

The purpose of the following discussion is to help students understand that, even though they may not agree with a law, it may have an important purpose—to protect them.

As a society, we have decided people under 18 should be protected from working in hazardous jobs or under difficult conditions (e.g., long hours). Many laws have been put in place for these reasons.

As you discuss these laws, refer to your earlier discussions of working conditions before worker safety laws were in place. You may want to show the photographs from Lesson 6 as a reminder to students. How have the working conditions for people under 18 improved with these laws? Use the list of laws and suggested benefits and drawbacks provided in this lesson as a guide for this discussion.

**In this exercise, it is important to allow students to form their own opinions, rather than telling them what to think or believe. It is not your role to defend these laws but to facilitate an open discussion.**

1. Explain:

During our last class, we discussed worker safety laws. I would like to talk about the benefits and drawbacks of these laws. Laws are usually made to benefit society, but at the same time, they usually put limitations on some or all of society. In our next group activity, we will examine the benefits and drawbacks of some of these worker safety laws.

Divide the class into groups of four. Assign one law to two groups. One group will focus on the benefits of the law. The other group will focus on the drawbacks of the law.

Choose laws that deal with work time, minimum wage, dangerous equipment, or break time. Information about these laws is provided in the “Teacher’s Key: The Benefits and Drawbacks of Workers Safety Laws” or the “Workplace Safety Laws” handout from Lesson 6.

2. Explain:

We’re going to debate the benefits and drawbacks of several laws. One group of four will present the benefits of a particular law to the class, while another group of four will present the drawbacks of the same law. After hearing the presentations, you’ll vote on whether you think the benefits of this law outweigh the drawbacks.

You’ll have five minutes to develop your lists, and then each group will present their viewpoint to the class. After each group has presented their side, you’ll have a chance to further discuss the law and vote. I will record the answers on the overhead.

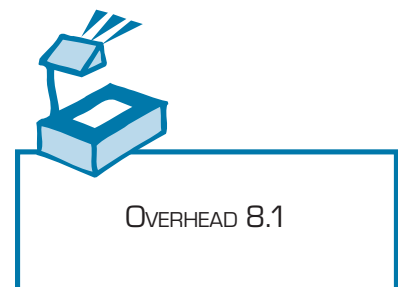
A chalkboard or easel may also be used to record the votes. If an odd number of foursomes results, have more than one group of four present the benefits or drawbacks of a particular law. Encourage students to think through what *they see* as the benefits and drawbacks of the law. No answers are right or wrong.

3. Show Overhead 8.1. Write one of the assigned laws in the left column. Ask the two groups assigned that law to present their opposing viewpoints. Write in the “benefits” and “drawbacks” of each law as they are mentioned.

4. After the “benefit” and “drawback” groups have finished presenting their sides for a particular law, ask the whole group the following questions:

a. What other benefits would you add to the list?

b. What other drawbacks would you add to the list?



- c. Why do you think this law was enacted?  
(Refer to the working conditions talked about in Lesson 6.)
- d. Do you think the benefits of this law outweigh the drawbacks?
- e. Why? Why not? How would working conditions be different without this law?

**TEACHER TIP:**

These are open-ended questions. You do not need to reach a group consensus or have all students agree that these laws are good.



- 5. Discuss the rest of the assigned laws. Use the teacher’s key as a guide. Continue to focus your discussion on weighing the benefits and drawbacks of each example.

Students may not agree with all of the laws. You do not need to convince them otherwise. The goal is to help students see that laws, despite their drawbacks, are in place for good reasons. We cannot reap the benefits of a healthy, safe workplace without giving up something. No matter what the drawbacks are, today’s working conditions are much better than they were 100 years ago, because of the laws.

- 6. Explain:  
Safety laws do benefit us in the workplace. They protect us from being asked to do things that are unsafe. If you feel you are being asked to do something unsafe in the workplace, you can address the issue with your employer. Let’s talk about how you might address a safety issue with your employer.

## Unsafe Workplace Communication Skills (20 minutes)

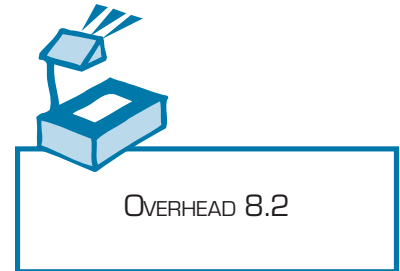
- 1. Ask:  
Have you, or has anyone you know, ever been in a work situation in which you felt you were being asked to do something unsafe? In what situation were you? What did you do about it?
- 2. Have a few students share their stories. Some students may have gone along, others may have tried to address the issue.
- 3. Ask:  
How did you *feel* in that situation?
- 4. Explain:  
These situations can be very difficult to handle. It’s hard to question an employer about what you are asked to do or about the safety of the work environment. You may be

afraid of losing your job or appearing uncooperative. The situation may involve your parents, who have always done something the same, perhaps unsafe, way.

At some time in your working career, you may be asked by your employer or another employee to do something that appears unsafe to you. What should you do in these situations?

One of the most important things you can do is work to keep your workplace safe. Let's use the acronym **S.A.F.E.** to help us remember how to address safety issues in the workplace.

5. Display Overhead 8.2 on the overhead projector. Using the information below, discuss each concept represented by the letters S.A.F.E.



**S:** *SEE the safety issue.*

The first step is to clearly identify what the safety issue is. Why do you feel uncomfortable? What is unsafe about this situation?

Sometimes we feel uncomfortable about something, but do not really acknowledge it until it is too late. It is good to stop and ask yourself why you feel unsafe or uncomfortable. Try to state your concerns in concrete language.

Whether or not a safety law is being broken, if you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, you should address the issue.

**A:** *ASK the right person or person(s) for help.*

Who is responsible for safety in your workplace? Who should be made aware of the situation? The workplace safety situation cannot be corrected, if no one knows the unsafe situation exists.

It may help to tell coworkers, parents, people at school, or union representatives about the problem. They can support you in your efforts to find a solution. It may also be helpful to have someone go with you when you approach your employer.

If your immediate supervisor is unwilling to make a change, talk to his or her supervisor. If you still do not get an adequate response, talk with the organization's personnel or human resource manager. If you do not get an adequate response within the organization, contact the following agencies:

Minnesota Occupational Safety and Health Administration (for any health and safety issues): 1-(877) 470-6742.

Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry (Wage and Hour Division) (for any legal issues): 1-(800) 342-5354.

***F: FIND*** a solution.

You may not always know what the best solution is, but, if you have ideas, it always helps to present them to someone who can solve the problem. Even if you don't have a solution, address the issue. Your employer can find the solution. When you present your ideas, be open to listening to others.

***E: EMPHASIZE*** the positive.

Whenever you address a workplace issue, do it in a positive manner, so your supervisor or employer does not get defensive. The following are a few guidelines to help you in your communication:

- a. When presenting a safety problem to an employer or coworker, focus on what you see and what you are concerned about. For example,

**“I am working around an unshielded power take-off. I am uncomfortable in this situation.”**

Rather than...

**“You are making me work too close to the power takeoff. You do not seem very concerned. You should be doing something about it.”**

- b. Focus the conversation on a solution, rather than on who is at fault.

Focusing on fault may only lead to a defensive response. Focusing on solutions will more likely lead to cooperation and agreement. For example,

**“I think we should put signs up on the floor after we have mopped it, so no one will slip and fall again.”**

Rather than...

**“It is your fault Joe got hurt when he fell. You mopped the floor and did not tell anyone about it. You really messed up.”**

- c. Help the employer or employee see that by implementing a solution, you will be reaching the same positive goal. For example,

**“If we put a guard on that piece of equipment, we can get the work done in almost the same amount of time but much more safely. In the long run, the company will save time and money by keeping workers safe.”**

Thank those who have implemented the changes. It may have taken extra time and money to make the safety changes.

- 6. Say:  
Let’s work on these positive approaches a little more. I am going to give you a statement. Please tell me whether it is done in the positive manner described above. If not, how could it be improved?
- 7. Read the following statements. Have students respond after each statement:
  - a. I would be happy to help, but I have already worked 18 hours this week and I can’t legally work any more hours.  
(Positive)

- b. You told me to use the meat slicer. Do you want to make me cut my finger off?

(Negative—how could you change this statement into a positive?)

One example of a positive response:

I'm not comfortable using this meat slicer until I have some training. Can you give me more training?

or

I'm only 17. Legally, I'm not supposed to use meat slicers.

- c. Thanks for ordering more rubber gloves. It really helps when we use cleaning products. (Positive)

8. Explain:

Now we're going to work through some more examples.

Pass out the "S.A.F.E. Communication Skills" handout. Have students work individually to complete the handout. Refer to the teacher's key for suggestions regarding each statement on the handout. Once students have completed the worksheet, ask them to share their sentences with the rest of the class. You can record their answers on a chalkboard or easel.

You may have to assist some students in turning the negative statements into positive ones. Talking through the examples and hearing other people's responses may also help those who are having difficulty.

9. Ask:

Do you have any questions about using the S.A.F.E. guidelines when addressing work safety issues? Hopefully, you can remember the word S.A.F.E., whenever you are trying to address a safety issue at work.

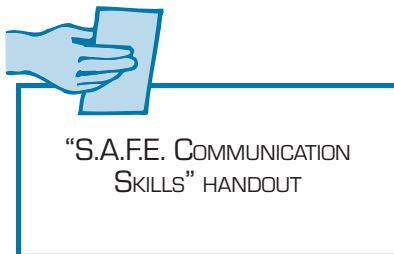
10. Say:

Let's apply S.A.F.E. to a workplace situation.

Use the following workplace scenario to walk the class through the acronym S.A.F.E., as you think about how to address the situation. Make a brief presentation of what you would actually say to the employer.

**Scenario:**

You work at a local golf course mowing the fairways. Your supervisor is hardly ever around. You received no training and no hearing protection equipment. You notice the trac-





tor you are using has nothing to protect you from getting hit by golf balls. It also has no seatbelt or rollbar, and some of the hills are steep.

11. Discuss how you handled the scenario. Ask students if they have any questions.
12. Ask:  
How would you use the S.A.F.E. approach, if you saw a family member doing something unsafe on your family farm?
13. Have students read through their “Performance Criteria and Checklist” and check the Lesson 8 activities they participated in today.

## Taking It Home:

No homework assignment.

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**Worker  
Safety Laws**

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**Benefits**

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**Drawbacks**

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## Teacher's Key: The Benefits and Drawbacks of Worker Safety Laws

Worker Safety Laws	Benefits	Drawbacks
<p><b>Limiting <i>how much</i> teens may work.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protects teens from being over-worked.</li> <li>• Prevents work from interfering with school.</li> <li>• Keeps teens from becoming overly tired.</li> <li>• Prevents teens from being taken advantage of by employers or parents.</li> <li>• Allows teens more time for extracurricular activities that promote their growth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limits amount of money earned.</li> <li>• Limits ability to compete with older workers who can work more.</li> <li>• Limits teens' independence and control of their schedules.</li> <li>• Limits those who are bored and want to work more.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Restricting <i>when</i> teens may work.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protects teens from having to work instead of going to school.</li> <li>• Prevents teens from having to work late and get up early for school.</li> <li>• Protects teens' health.</li> <li>• Protects teens from being at work late, when crimes are most likely to happen.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limits ability to compete with older people who can work more hours.</li> <li>• Limits choice to work late or early.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Limiting the age at which a person may start working.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protects children from child labor and abuse.</li> <li>• Ensures that children will most likely be in school.</li> <li>• Allows children to enjoy their childhoods.</li> <li>• Allows children to learn and better themselves.</li> <li>• Protects children from jobs that may injure them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeps children from earning money sooner.</li> <li>• Limits freedom and choice.</li> <li>• Limits children who are capable and desire to work.</li> <li>• Limits families who need the extra income.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Prohibiting jobs that involve driving or other high-risk tasks.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevents teens from being in situations in which they may hurt themselves or others.</li> <li>• Protects teens from being given the worst jobs because they are young or new.</li> <li>• Protects teens from being hurt by other careless workers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limits the type of jobs teens can have.</li> <li>• Limits independence and freedom to choose jobs.</li> </ul>



# Teacher's Key: S.A.F.E. Communication Skills Worksheet

Directions: Read each statement carefully. Using the S.A.F.E. communication skills, decide if this statement is written in a positive or negative manner. If the statement is negative, rewrite it so that it addresses this issue with your employer in a positive way.

1. **All you care about is making money. You won't spend the money for the right equipment. No wonder people are getting hurt.**

Positive or Negative Statement? **Negative**

*Suggestion: It seems we could reduce the number of people getting hurt here, if we spent some money for safety equipment. If less people got hurt, we could be more productive and serve our customers better.*

2. **If we trained people on how to use the hot oil fryer, less people would be burned. The restaurant would save money, and your workers would be happier.**

Positive or Negative Statement? **Positive**

3. **I don't feel comfortable climbing this ladder and working from this height. Could I do another job that doesn't involve working high above the ground?**

Positive or Negative Statement? **Positive**

4. **You can't make me work any more hours. If you do, I'll quit.**

Positive or Negative Statement? **Negative**

*Suggestion: I've already worked the maximum number of hours I'm allowed to by law. Working any more hours today would be against the law.*

5. **I'm just 15, and I'm not getting paid enough money in this nursing home to lift that person.**

Positive or Negative Statement? **Negative**

*Suggestion: In my orientation, I was told that I'm too young to lift residents in the nursing home. I could find another aide to help you lift this person.*