saif

Work. Life. Oregon.

What hazard should you fix first:
How to prioritize them

Sometimes workplace inspection teams can come up with long lists of items to address that often have very little impact on safety. These long lists can also have a negative impact on the relationship between workers and management. These lists can seem overwhelming, but there is a strategy to make them more manageable—prioritize the hazards. Focusing on the highest priority hazards helps inspection teams maintain a good relationship with leadership while making a difference in workplace safety.

Staying focused on hazards that can lead to injuries while keeping your eye on serious injury and fatality risks also helps the management team know where to focus attention for the most impact.

The graphic below provides a framework to prioritize hazards based on how likely it could happen (probability) and if it does, how bad it could be (severity). For example, an extension cord coiled in a corner that is not used very often could cause a trip and fall, leading to injury. Because it isn't used very often, it has a low probability of occurring so it would have a low priority assigned to it.

If the probability of an injury is "imminent"—or about to happen—and the likely severity is "serious", it's known as "imminent danger" (the upper righthand corner of the graphic). These must be addressed immediately and always cause work in the area to stop until it is fixed. One example is a worker using a step ladder improperly: rather than unfolding it and ensuring the spreader is locked in place, it is leaning against a wall as they climb it. This could lead to a serious fall.

This graphic can be used to prioritize hazards at all levels: a five would be addressed immediately, fours would be dealt with as soon as practical, and anything rated three or under would be addressed as time allows. This brings an order to the process and ensures that workers are not overwhelmed by a long list of corrections.

Key actions to prioritize hazards

Identify and define SIF risks

- Clearly define serious injury or fatality (SIF) risks in your workplace. Because these hazards have serious severity, they are usually high priority, unless they are very unlikely to happen. Examples include hazards that could result in major head injuries, spinal cord injuries, amputations, catastrophic fractures, and serious burns.

- Use past injury/incident and inspection data to identify common SIF risks to find areas for improvement.

Involve employees

- Employees with firsthand experience in the area being evaluated offer valuable insights to risks.

- Have an effective hazard reporting system so employees can easily report hazards and know that they will be addressed.

Probability

	Minor	Moderate	Serious
Imminent	MEDIUM PRIORITY 3	HIGH PRIORITY 4	HIGHEST PRIORITY 5
Probable	MEDIUM PRIORITY 2	MEDIUM PRIORITY 3	HIGH PRIORITY 4
Unlikely	LOW PRIORITY 1	MEDIUM PRIORITY 2	MEDIUM PRIORITY 3

Severity

Conduct thorough inspections

- Have a regular inspection schedule, focusing on areas and tasks with the highest risk of serious injuries or fatalities.

- Consider red flag situations that may add to injury risk. Find out more about SIFs (**saif.com/SIF**).

Use a system to prioritize hazards

- The prioritization graphic in this handout (page one) is an example of a system to use and includes colors and numbers that convey how quickly to address each hazard.

- Make sure to address the highest priority hazards first.

Review and evaluate

- Review and update safety procedures regularly to address new hazards and improve existing controls.

- Track the effectiveness of control measures and adjust as needed.

Control hazards

Once hazards have been identified and prioritized, the next step is to eliminate or effectively control those hazards. Use the hierarchy of controls to control hazards (**saif.com/S1271**).

- Controls should be prioritized in the same way as hazards to ensure they are addressed by level of risk.

- Check that control measures are in place and working well.

Summary

Prioritizing hazards will help to ensure that the most severe hazards are addressed first, creating a safer workplace and helping to manage resources more effectively.

Use the Fatal 10 and Red-flag situations quick cards with SIFs.

The Fatal 10

- Vehicle/equipment operation
- Working at heights
- Workplace violence
- Machine hazards/lockout failures
- Hazardous materials/ environmental exposure
- Electrical/arc flash hazards
- Fire/explosion/hot work
- Confined spaces/trenching/ engulfment
- Suspended loads
- Struck by objects and equipment

S1097A | SAIF 06.21

Red-flag situations 🚩

- Nonroutine work
- Stressors: physical, environmental, etc.
- Fatigue
- Production pressures
- Inadequate supervision and follow-through
- Working alone
- Inadequate operating procedures, training, and follow-up
- Poor equipment or task design
- New employees
- Lack of engineering controls

S1097A | SAIF 06.21

ACTIVITY IDEAS

- Group discussion: Identify top hazards at your workplace. Then using the model in this handout, prioritize them.

- Review staged hazard scenarios and practice prioritizing the hazards pictured. One source of staged photos is WorkSafeBC (**bit.ly/3Ytu7Eb**).

- Use hazard mapping activity to identify workplace hazards and come up with solutions (**saif.com/S1289**). Another option is to create a job hazard analysis of one of the tasks at your workplace.