



Maintaining focus at work

Stay alert, stay safe

Distraction top health and safety risk

Logging sites, mills, and other forestry operations are dynamic and high-risk environments. Workers in these settings face significant hazards from machinery, vehicles, tools, and environmental conditions.

Research has identified that a lack of focus is frequently linked to incidents across sectors. Psychosocial hazards such as fatigue, stress, and environmental distractions play a critical role in reducing attention and increasing risk.

Maintaining focus is not only an individual responsibility but also a reflection of workplace culture. A strong health and safety culture provides workers with the systems, supports, and environment needed to remain attentive to the task at hand. Organizations that encourage open communication, set clear expectations, and demonstrate leadership commitment to safety create conditions where workers are more likely to stay alert and intervene when risks are identified.

Common causes of distraction

- Fatigue: Long shifts and demanding work reduce alertness and reaction time.
- Repetition and monotony: Routine tasks may cause decreased vigilance.
- Noise and environmental conditions: Chainsaws, mobile equipment, heat, cold, and uneven ground create distraction and strain.
- Multitasking and time pressure: Dividing attention increases the risk of missing critical hazards.
- Interruptions: Unexpected disruptions or unplanned interactions may lead to potential incidents.
- Personal concerns: Stress related to health, finances, or family issues can interfere with concentration.

Risks of losing focus

- Injury or fatality: Loss of focus can lead to serious incidents, including slips, trips, falls, contact with moving equipment, or failure to follow critical safety procedures. Even a brief distraction may result in life-threatening injuries.
- Compromised safety controls: Overlooking defects or hazards may allow unsafe conditions to persist.
- Near misses: Close calls are warning signs that distraction and loss of focus are creating unsafe conditions.
- Cumulative stress and fatigue: Incidents and near misses can heighten stress across crews, further increasing risk.

How to stay focused

- Preparation and hazard awareness: Pause before tasks, scan for hazards, and review steps.
- Reducing distractions: Limit personal devices, wear personal protective equipment, keep areas clear, and communicate to avoid interruptions.
- Supporting worker well-being: Take breaks, stay hydrated, eat well, and stretch to manage fatigue.
- Promoting engagement: Monitor work and [foster a strong workplace culture](#) in which reporting unsafe conditions becomes the norm.

Key priorities for employers

- Employers can help workers stay alert and on task by strengthening workplace health and safety culture.
- Involve everyone in safety: Workers and management should both take part in creating safety policies, guidelines, training, and messaging.
- Encourage open conversations: Safety discussions should be practical, respectful, and go both ways between workers and management.
- Provide mental health support: Make [mental health training, tools, and resources available](#).
- Keep policies clear and useful: Safety policies should be easy to understand, suited to the audience, and consistently applied and enforced.
- Supportive supervision: Supervisors should [lead by example, put safety first](#), and be approachable and proactive.

For more information on building a strong health and safety culture and supporting workers in staying alert and safe on the job, [contact your local health and safety specialist](#).