

The Danger Zone of Familiarity

If you've ever worked the same job or had the same type of work for any number of years, then you've probably become quite familiar with the in's and out's of the details of your job and the protocols to perform your work. It makes your job that much easier when you have a good knowledge of what you are doing. It also puts you in the **danger zone of familiarity** when it comes to working with the priority of safety on your mind.

You and I can become so familiar with our work that safety takes a back seat. After all, we know what we're doing. We've done it for years and nothing has gone wrong. But it's in that split second, when our guard is down, everything can change.



I remember my wood shop teacher back in my school days, who had been working with wood and powered saws for years. One day when carrying out a routine cut, ran his hand through a table saw and lost several fingers. He probably never imagined that it would happen to him. He'd done it for years without incident. He was familiar with the table saw. He knew its potential danger. But at that moment, his mind wasn't on safety; it was getting that particular piece of wood cut correctly.

In another incident, I received word of a family we know, whose son was in a terrible accident. He's been an underwater photographer for years in Hawaii. His family has always held concern for his safety swimming near sharks. There is definitely an element of danger in such a position. But it wasn't a shark attack, it was the propeller of a boat. He's now fighting for his life.

Maybe you know someone or even yourself, who experienced an injury doing something that you or they have done for years without any problems whatsoever. I wonder how many of you could write a paragraph in this article having had this same experience or knowing someone who has.



When we become so familiar with what we are doing, our muscle memory takes over and we lose that state of safety consciousness. Even though we've conducted the same task over and over again, it's as though we need to approach every task as if it is the first time. We need to have a renewed respect for the tools that we are using and awareness of the potential risks in the tasks that we are performing.

If you are in a position where you've become familiar with your day- to-day tasks, then know this; you've entered the **danger zone of familiarity**. It's going to take greater conscious effort on your part to stay alert to the potential safety risks around you. In fact, stop right now and think through the potential risks associated with your job and what you need to do to prevent injury to yourself and others.

Statistics tell us that there is a greater potential for injury or incident the more familiar you are in your position than someone who isn't. That's because most people have entered the danger zone of familiarity without even knowing it. Don't let it be you!

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