

# **TITLE: 2908 TAKE SAFETY HOME:**

## *Preventing Off-Job Injuries*

**20 MINUTES**

**PRODUCTION YEAR: 2009**

### **PROGRAM SYNOPSIS:**

After working 25 years as a firefighter and paramedic, Martin Lesperance has treated thousands of injuries and medical emergencies. Now retired, Martin is a popular safety speaker, sharing his experiences with workers in order to prevent injuries. As a former EMT, Martin knows that the majority of injuries occur off the job and conducted this presentation in front of a live audience to encourage all workers to "take safety home."

Martin recalls many true stories of off-job incidents resulting in injuries and deaths to illustrate the importance of such critical safety issues as thinking about the repercussions of your actions, heeding warning signs and labels, the importance of PPE off the job, preventing motor vehicle collisions and house fires and avoiding slips, trips and falls. Other topics include the "weekend warrior" syndrome, taking it easy on long weekends and holidays and the correlation between alcohol consumption and the amount of off-job injuries and fatalities.

**SHOOTING LOCATION:** An employee meeting area as well as various outside venues where off-job activities take place.

### **PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:**

After watching the videotape program, the viewer will be able to identify the following:

- What the repercussions of your off-job actions can be;
- Why it is crucial to heed the warning signs and labels of equipment used away from the workplace;
- Why wearing PPE off the job is just as important as wearing it on the job;
- Why people must never think that motor vehicle collisions and house fires can happen to them;
- Why we shouldn't undertake recreational activities as if our lives depend on them;
- Why we should take it easy on long weekends and holidays;
- How drinking alcohol correlates to the number of off-job injuries and fatalities.

### **INSTRUCTIONAL CONTENT:**

#### **SAFETY IS NOT JUST A WORKPLACE ISSUE**

- Martin tells the story of a group of friends who went out to a bar. After leaving the bar, they ended up on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor of an apartment building standing next to a garbage chute.
- When one of the friends asked who wanted to ride down, another "takes up the challenge and down he goes. His friends raced to the bottom. They get to the bottom and there's his friend; he's dead," says Martin.
- "I don't know how safe of a worker he was at work, but his poor decisions that day not only cost him his life, but devastated the lives of his loved ones," adds Martin. "You see, preventing this type of needless tragedy has everything to do with safety. You see, safety is not just a workplace issue."

#### **WHY WE HAVE SO MANY OFF-JOB INJURIES**

- Martin says that a lot of people don't make it into work because of off-job injuries. "Now in 25 years working as a firefighter and a paramedic, I know I've attended more off-the-job injuries than on-the-job injuries."
- "It's easy to understand why. We spend more time away from work than we do at work," he notes. "Also, at the worksite, there's certain safety rules and regulations that we follow or at least we should be following, but at home, anything goes. And, after all, who's going to come down on you?"
- It shouldn't take someone else hounding you about safety to keep you from killing yourself, according to Martin. "That should be your own responsibility; and yet, so many people just don't get it, especially when they are off the job."
- Martin says that some of the companies where he speaks at are starting to monitor off-job injuries and some of them have noticed that they have 10 times more off-job injuries than on-job injuries. "One company noticed that they had 20 times more off-the-job injuries than on-the-job injuries. That's 20 times more loss of income; that's 20 times more impact on families and 20 times more pain and suffering," he adds.
- "I think I know a reason why this happens. You see, at the worksite, you could take a person who would refuse to use a ladder because of it's unsafe condition; but yet, that same person may be the person who goes home, drinks six beers, fires up the chainsaw, stands on top of a stool and attempts to cut branches down in the tree in his backyard," Martin says.
- At work, we wear our personal protective equipment; when we drive company vehicles, we wear our seatbelts; and, when we're at work, we follow the proper safety procedures that are in place, according to Martin. "But on Friday afternoon, we take off our hardhats, our steel-toed boots and our safety knowledge, we close that locker, we go home and it's never to be seen or used again until we're back at work Monday morning."
- After dealing with a lot of injuries, Martin says he knows that a broken leg hurts just as much if you fall off a ladder at home when you're reaching for something as it does when you fall off of a ladder at the worksite.
- "If you cut off three fingers with a circular saw, it's going to cost and it's going to disrupt your life just as much if it happened at the worksite compared to if it happened at home," says Martin. "And heaven forbid, if you make a poor decision and you get yourself killed, it really doesn't matter to your family if it happened on the job or if it happened off the job. The problem is it happened; you're dead and that's going to hurt a lot of people."
- There seems to be a gap between the safety attitude and safety practices, between on-the-job and off-the-job, according to Martin. "Let's try to narrow that gap; let's try to close that gap."

## **REPERCUSSIONS OF YOUR ACTIONS & WARNING SIGNS/LABELS**

- “Now I think one of the reasons people get hurt off the job is that they fail to think of the repercussions of their actions and they fail to pay attention to warning signs and labels,” says Martin.
- He adds that one of the best tips he can give is to stop and think about the repercussions of your actions. “Think about what could happen in the event something goes wrong. Now if you’re not sure what could happen or if you’re unfamiliar with what you are about to do, pay close attention to the warning signs and labels and read the operator’s manual, especially the section that deals with safety.”
- Sometimes, people just have total disregard for safety, according to Martin. “They have total disregard for the effects of injuries and they have total disregard for warning signs and labels.”
- “Here’s what I mean. Every year, there are dozens and dozens of intelligent people who will take a perfectly good hand and put it underneath a running lawnmower to grab something as valuable as an old stick or maybe a wet clump of grass,” says Martin. “Now in that split second, that spinning blade will do such a number on your hand that it will never be the same.”
- “Of course, warning stickers and manuals won’t help if a tool or machine is used in the wrong way,” continues Martin. He uses an example of two people using a lawnmower as hedge trimmers.
- Every year, emergency departments get their fair share of hand and foot injuries caused by lawnmowers, says Martin. “But it’s not only lawnmowers; it’s using any tool, chemical or machine in a way that it wasn’t designed is just asking for trouble.”
- “It doesn’t matter what you plan on doing. If you’re going to take your ATV for a ride, if you’re going to use a hand or power tool or if you’re going out hunting or fishing, every activity has safety rules that must be followed,” Martin concludes. “So take a few seconds to understand what those rules are and to think about what could happen in the event something goes wrong. Thinking things through when it comes to safety; it’s a great way to prevent injuries.”

## **WEARING PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT**

- Another reason for the gap between on-job and off-job injuries is people failing to wear their personal protective equipment, according to Martin. “We wear our PPE while on the job, but yet, how many of us wear it off the job? And if we don’t, why not?” he asks.
- Personal protective equipment has to be worn all the time, but so many times people think they just don’t need it. Martin uses an example of an ambulance call he did several years ago to illustrate this point.
- After tuning up a motorcycle, a guy was going to ride it around the block. Without putting on his helmet which was sitting beside the back, he rode down the street and went around a corner. His front tire hit some gravel and sand, the bike went down and he skidded across the road.
- He hit his head on a street light and died in front of his neighbors and his kids. “Now I can’t say for sure if he would have survived if he had been wearing his helmet, but his helmet was right there. All he had to do was put it on,” says Martin.
- A motorcycle helmet is personal protective equipment just as much as your hardhat in the workplace, adds Martin. “Just as much as a life jacket is when you’re boating or a safety strap when you’re in your tree stand when you’re hunting or a seatbelt when you’re in your car.”

## **MOTOR VEHICLE COLLISIONS & HOUSE FIRES**

- People think an injury will never happen to them, according to Martin. “If you woke up tomorrow morning knowing that this month you were going to be involved in a motor vehicle collision, would you make sure you were wearing your seatbelts? Would you drive more defensively?” he asks.
- Martin asks the audience if they knew a house fire were to occur in their homes this month, would they make sure their fire alarms were functioning properly. “Would you practice an escape route with your children? Would you be more careful?”
- “But yet so many people die in motor vehicle collisions because they didn’t wear their seatbelts. So many people die in house fires, including children, because their parents didn’t make sure the smoke alarms were working properly,” says Martin. He adds that each of us have to realize that these motor vehicle collisions, these house fires and other emergencies can happen just as easily to us as anyone else; no one is immune to injuries.
- You can be injured in a motor vehicle collision driving to the supermarket; you can fall off of your roof while adjusting your satellite dish; and, you can cut off your fingers when you’re building a deck or a fence, says Martin. “Don’t think it will never happen to you. I’ve attended way too many people in my ambulance to understand that these injuries can happen to anyone.”

## **SLIPS, TRIPS & FALLS**

- Martin says that by far the most common causes of injuries he’s attended were a result of slips, trips and falls. “Now just like slips, trips and falls are a main work concern, it’s the same thing at home. And the injuries I’ve attended at home as the result of falls were just as devastating as the ones that happened at the workplace.”
- Martin then tells a story about doing a talk about slips, trips and falls for a group of 70 safety professionals. After explaining how many people are injured when they fall off a ladder while putting up Christmas lights, two members of the audience came up and spoke to him.
- The first told him that he had fallen off a ladder putting up Christmas lights and hit his head on the sidewalk below, knocking him unconscious. He said he would have frozen to death had the neighbor’s kid not walked by, saw him on the ground and went and told his mother.
- The second guy said the same thing had happened to him, but he “blew out” his knee, shattering it. He said he used to play competitive hockey and ball. “As he walked away, he had a very, very pronounced limp, which he’ll probably have the rest of his life,” says Martin.
- “So this is just a reminder that ladders are a huge source of off-the-job injuries, so whenever using a ladder, use extreme caution,” Martin concludes.

## **THE ‘WEEKEND WARRIOR’ SYNDROME**

- We need to beware of the “weekend warrior syndrome,” in which we may try to overdo it when we participate in recreational activities, according to Martin.
- For several years, Martin worked as a paramedic for an ambulance service based inside the emergency department of a mid-sized hospital. He says he was amazed to see how many people (mostly guys) would come into the emergency department who had been injured while participating in recreational activities.
- He says he would see people in their baseball uniforms and their baseball injuries in the summertime and see them in their hockey uniforms and their hockey injuries in the wintertime. “I’m not saying that you shouldn’t play hard, but keep things in perspective. How many people in this room make their living playing professional sports?” asks Martin.

- You don't have to play as if your livelihood depends on it, he says. "The Pittsburgh Steelers are not going to call up a 52-year-old guy who's 60 pounds overweight, chain smokes, really likes his beer and hasn't been off the couch for the past six months. They're not going to call you; get over it."
- "We have to realize those bumps and bruises that we could shake off when we were 23 years old, well now, we get those bumps and bruises a lot easier," adds Martin. "They hurt a lot more and the pain stays with us a lot longer."
- Martin, who was once a golden glove boxer, recalls a while back when he was in his forties and had begun working out in the gym to get back in shape. He asked a 21-year-old at the gym if he'd like to do some sparring and the "kid" said he would.
- After a first round of just going through the motions and second round of stepping up the action, round three began with the kid throwing a lazy jab and Martin countering with a punch "right on the button." The kid responded with a hard, well-timed body shot that reverberated throughout the gym and took Martin's breath away.
- When he regained his composure, Martin asked himself what he was trying to prove. "Here I am in my 40s trying to compete physically with a 21-year-old guy and guys, you've got to realize, we can't do things like that anymore. So have fun, don't over do it and don't play as if your livelihood depends on it," he tells the audience.

### **TAKE IT EASY ON LONG WEEKENDS AND HOLIDAYS**

- Every Tuesday after a long weekend, we open up the newspaper and read about the death toll, how many people were killed, their names and their ages, says Martin. "We read about how many people were injured. You know, and it ranges from motor vehicle collisions to drownings to people falling in the campfires. Face it, long weekends are high-risk times."
- "People are driving home from the long weekend and people drive like idiots," says Martin. "And they're driving home from the long weekend and they're so tired they can hardly keep their eyes open and they have their entire family in the vehicle."
- He adds that people are "drunker than skunks" and they load up the boat with other drunk people. "No one is wearing a life jacket and some of their swimming ability is equal to an anvil. Or people get into arguments with the campers at the next campsite over and it escalates into bloodshed."
- The point is to take it easy on long weekends and think about the people around you, according to Martin. "Even the best long weekend can turn into a horrible experience if you cut off half your foot with an ax while you're chopping the firewood or your child drowns. Long weekends are supposed to be fun, not deadly."

### **DRINKING ALCOHOL & DOING STUPID THINGS**

- While Martin says he likes his beer as much as anyone else, he's noticed that a lot of the serious injuries and fatalities he's attended included alcohol. "There's a direct correlation between the amount of alcohol consumed and the amount of injuries and fatalities."
- He recalls a television commercial they had where he lives that shows a young adult male with blood all over his face trying to get into the back of an ambulance with his wife. The commercial ends with the words, "If you drink and drive, you're a bloody idiot."
- Well, it's not only drinking and driving that causes problems; it's drinking and anything else that needs any kind of hand-eye coordination or decision-making capabilities," says Martin. He has attended people who have been seriously injured or killed while drinking and driving their car, their ATV and snowmobile, as well as drinking and using chain saws, playing with firearms, walking and talking too much to the wrong person.
- Alcohol can give us a false level of confidence as people try to do things they would never attempt to do if they were sober, Martin adds. "Now I think everyone in this room knows someone who's tried to do something extremely dangerous under the influence of alcohol; in fact, they might be sitting in your chair right now. Now, if you did and came out of it okay, you were lucky, but you never want to rely on luck when it comes to your safety."
- Martin wonders if the guy who took the trip down the garbage chute have done that sober? I doubt it, but that day some parents lost a son. They don't care if he was drunk; they lost a son. He's dead," he says.
- "But if you think that's stupid, what about the guy who drinks seven beers and puts his kids in the car and drives home?" Martin asks. "And that happens a lot more often than someone taking a trip down the garbage chute."
- Alcohol can affect our judgment, according to Martin. "Maybe that's why 40 percent of boating deaths include alcohol; maybe that's why 36 percent of motor vehicle collision fatalities involve alcohol. Maybe that's why so many people die in snowmobile and ATV crashes because of alcohol."
- "There's a saying that goes like this: 'Friends don't let friends drink and drive.' Let's add something to that. Let's say, 'Friends don't let friends drink and do stupid things,'" Martin says.

### **CONCLUSION**

- Another good reason you should be safe on the job is because your children and grandchildren are going to be watching you, according to Martin. "They are going to imitate you; they look up you. So teach them to do the safe things, and you can do this by setting a good example."
- "Whatever you do, don't teach them how to hurt themselves; don't teach them how to kill themselves. Teaching a child to be safe is the best life skill you can ever teach one," concludes Martin.