

The Workplace is No Place for Horseplay

Here's a good one: an employee gets duct-taped to a chair while working in an office building, and then, while bound, is sent on an elevator ride.

Funny, right? Such pranks are all over YouTube. And movies like *Jackass 3D*, which is nothing more than self-inflicted pranks, are big box office.

But in reality horseplay can pose a serious threat to safety and is an on-going, hard-to-control part of the everyday working environment. Employees get a little bored with their jobs late in their shift, so they try to liven things up with a little “fun.” But horseplay is never fun and in fact can be hard to distinguish from harassment, discrimination, and even workplace violence.

As in the case of the employee taped to the chair: She ended up suing, and winning, and the defendants included not only prankster employees, but on-site contractors, too, who were merely by-standers. By-standers who did nothing and said nothing.

Horseplay hurts

One reason horseplay persists is that it makes a good story — and now, good video to share with the whole world. Horseplay stories don't usually include jokes gone wrong, nor do they recognize the embarrassment and humiliation of the victim of a gag — or the resulting lawsuits and terminations.



Why do some people feel the need to fool around in a work environment? For some, it's a way to alleviate boredom; for others it's a way to alleviate stress; and for others, it's a way to get attention and notoriety. Although the reasons may differ as to why someone behaves this way, the consequences tend to be the same. People get hurt.

Horseplay at work is also closely linked to bullying behavior, when jokes are actually harassment targeting new workers or others who, in someone's opinion, do not yet fit in with the crew. While a prankster might consider some stunts or practical jokes to be harmless, it's really the target of the prank who defines what is funny and what is hurtful.

Pranks in the workplace can only mean one thing at the very least: the participants are not focusing on their jobs. Their horseplay is drawing their attention elsewhere. What's worse, they often distract others from their jobs too. Not paying attention to your job or your surrounding environment creates a dangerous situation where injuries can occur.

There are as many types of horseplay as there are jobs, and it would be impossible to list them all. It is enough to say that after an injury or a fatal accident, everyone is sorry the horseplay took place, especially the victims and their families. However, "I'm sorry" can't bring back a finger, an eye or a life.

Don't pretend it's not happening

Securitas has policies against horseplay, and there are very likely procedures outlined in the client post orders — rules against participating in it and rules about dealing with others who are engaging in it. As evidenced in the example that opened this article, inaction — not taking steps to try to prevent or stop horseplay, or not reporting misbehavior — has its consequences too.

Although you might consider reporting someone as "uncool," consider that most companies, including ours, have limits on how much fooling around they will accept. Putting a stop to pranks and pranksters before they get started is not only a safety prevention strategy, it might save someone from losing his or her job.

Remember to look past the humor when others start horsing around. Recognize that it poses a dangerous threat to all. What might be funny today could easily be tomorrow's tragedy.

By standing up to horseplay you can make sure the joke is not on you — or on anyone else.

There are many safety resources available for Securitas officers, including past issues of *Security Spotlight*, Safety Smart materials, and monthly safety awareness articles posted on the Securitas Portal. As an example of the kind of information available to you, an excerpt of a safety awareness article is included below.

Tips on Dealing with Pranksters

Securitas officers at nuclear power plants have developed a good approach to correct someone's at-risk behavior. Provided that intervention is prescribed in your post orders, you may:

- Excuse yourself for the interruption, addressing the person as quietly as possible. Don't embarrass the person.
- Introduce yourself.
- Express what you observed directly, but tactfully.
- Don't be abrupt, offensive or accusatory.
- Maintain a non-threatening demeanor.
- Show appreciation for the individual's cooperation.
- Listen to the individual without interrupting.
- Agree with the person when possible.
- Encourage the individual to conform to safety standards.
- Discuss with the individual any further actions you need to take.

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