Employees who work on and around powerful electrical equipment face unique risks. Dangers, such as electrical shock, electrocution, and arc flashes, can result in severe injury or death, but the nature of electricity itself — silent and invisible — means workers must be especially vigilant.

The risk, however, is all too real. According to the Electrical Safety Foundation International, exposure to electric current is the sixth most common cause of on-the-job fatalities, killing more than 150 people each year. This is in addition to more than 1,600 nonfatal electrical injuries annually. In almost every case, the death or injury was due to preventable, human error.

This complacency comes from cognitive bias: a systematic way of thinking that influences the decisions or judgments you make. Because attention is a limited resource, cognitive bias lets your brain go on autopilot when it comes to completing predictable actions, so it can focus on making higher-value decisions.

Cognitive bias is also what makes it easy for an employee who works day in and day out with a specific machine to become less alert to electrical risk, while also making it more difficult to engage that employee in appropriate safety training. After all, they reason, they already know it all, it can never happen to them, and they haven’t heard of something like that happening in a while.

The overconfidence, wishful thinking, and recency bias that these statements represent are all cognitive biases to keep in mind when designing an effective electrical safety program.

5 WAYS TO OVERCOME COGNITIVE BIAS & IMPROVE EMPLOYEE RECEPTIVENESS TO TRAINING

1. Make it relatable. No one goes to work thinking an electrical injury will happen to them. Because it’s a relatively rare injury in the average workplace, it can be hard to conceptualize using typical training methods and, therefore, easy to dismiss or forget. To combat this tendency, personalize the training with case studies. By using the real-life stories of people who were injured or killed, you make it easier for the employee to relate to the victim so that the training sticks.

Exposure to electric current is the #6 cause of on-the-job fatalities

Despite the risk of death or serious injury, it’s far too easy for employees to become complacent and forget about the dangers of electrical injury. While employees are trained to avoid the heavy mechanical parts, moving blades, conveyor belts, and other obvious visual hazards, all it takes is the accidental touch of a live wire to get an electric shock or for a short-circuit to create an electrical explosion.

Every year, electricity causes

1,750 Injuries
150+ Deaths

5 WAYS TO OVERCOME COGNITIVE BIAS & IMPROVE EMPLOYEE RECEPTIVENESS TO TRAINING
Tip: Use accident reports from the same facility or trade, or bring in guest speakers who have been injured to share their stories.

2. **Offer convenience.** Studies have shown that time of day affects learning. For example, people tend to be better at declarative memory tasks (such as recalling details) in the morning. Semantic memory tasks (those that synthesize new information with what we already know) are better accomplished in the afternoon. Of course, the ability to concentrate on training can also be impacted by other factors, such as natural circadian rhythms, work schedules, and distractions like deadlines or personal issues. The fact is that there is no single perfect time for training. That’s why it’s important to conduct training when the employee is most receptive.

Online learning makes it convenient for employees to learn on their schedule, review content, and get training in their native language. Online learning also allows employers that run multiple shifts to provide training 24 hours a day for organizations while ensuring consistent content delivery.

3. **Provide blended training.** Using the same training method over and over can make it easy for employees to feel like they’ve heard it all before. Blend your training methods for the best results. For example, incorporate an online component that provides new material with an on-site, scenario-based session. This blended approach reduces the amount of time a trainer needs to spend covering fundamental information, making better use of face-to-face time by providing hands-on, site-specific training activities that give employees the opportunity to test their new knowledge in the real world. When it comes to safety, experience is often the best teacher.

Tip: Use microlearning to break down training into quick, consumable sections. It alleviates attention fatigue and helps workers fit training sessions into their busy schedules.

4. **Keep it frequent.** Too many employers use regulations to determine their training frequency. But regulations should be seen as the bare minimum, not the maximum. Roll out frequent, microlearning electrical safety training materials between more substantial annual training efforts.

Tip: Use short refresher courses, expert-led videos, and task-specific surveys to keep safety top of mind.

5. **Make it interactive.** Employees can only learn so much through passive methods, such as lectures or videos. The more you can engage employees, the more they will learn. Remember that your employees know the worksite better than you, so begin by getting their input. Ask about their tools and hazards to start them thinking about how to improve safety.

Tip: Add interactivity to training with an app like Skillsoft Certitude. You can use the app to create equipment-specific lockout/tagout procedural checklists, arc-flash PPE assessment surveys, and follow-up quizzes and policy attestations to reinforce knowledge and help ensure compliance.

Rather than promoting a zero-reported case worksite, create a culture that incentivizes employees to actively seek out and report hazards to keep electrical safety top of mind.

**ABOUT SKILLSOFT COMPLIANCE**

Skillsoft Compliance provides risk mitigation and workplace safety training tailored to meet an organization’s unique needs, delivering eLearning content in over 500 risk topics and 32 languages.