

Creating a Culture of Safety

Leadership Strategies That Work

In a print shop, preventing injuries takes more than just compliance with checklists and policies. It hinges on the example set by leaders and the culture they cultivate daily. A genuine safety culture grows when owners and managers model the safe behaviors they expect, reinforce safety standards consistently, and actively encourage employees to speak up about hazards.

Such leadership goes beyond issuing rules. It means walking on the production floor, wearing the required protective gear, and never cutting corners. By showing that safety is everyone's responsibility, from the front office to the press room, leaders in turn build credibility. Small daily actions make a big difference: routine safety walkthroughs, open conversations about near-misses, and recognizing good practices help build trust and engagement.

When employees see that their concerns are heard and safe behavior is appreciated, they're more likely to stay vigilant. For the business, the payoff is fewer incidents over time. A safety culture cannot be mandated by policy alone; it thrives through consistent leadership habits. A strong safety culture is ultimately shaped from the top down and lived from the ground up.

At the federal level, OSHA requires employers to provide a safe working environment, including training, hazard communication, and adherence to general safety guidelines. While OSHA does not mandate safety committees for all businesses, establishing one can support a company's ability to meet its safety and health obligations. In Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas, there is no requirement for a formal safety committee, but companies that invest in structured safety leadership often see stronger outcomes. Recognizing teams that meet safety and injury-free goals can further reinforce a culture of accountability and pride in maintaining a safe workplace. Ongoing training is another key component of effective safety programs. Members can utilize MidAmerica U for on-demand safety modules, Traliant for compliance-based learning, or work directly with PIA MidAmerica's EHS professionals to build a tailored, sustainable safety plan that supports both people and productivity.

Need help strengthening your safety program? Email us at info@piamidam.org.



Preventing Workplace Injuries in Print Shops

Beneath the noise of busy presses in a production facility lie hazards that can alter a worker's life in an instant. The printing and related support activities industry (NAICS 323) reported about 5,900 nonfatal workplace injuries in 2023, a 20% decrease from 2022 (BLS SOII, 2023). Still, thousands of injuries remain preventable each year.

MACHINERY HAZARDS: CUTS AND ENTANGLEMENTS

Printing presses and bindery machines contain moving parts that can crush, slice, or amputate when guards are removed or safety interlocks are bypassed. Enforcing lockout/tagout, maintaining guards, and training employees in safe practices remain essential steps in preventing these catastrophic injuries.

ERGONOMIC STRAIN

Injuries often build slowly. Nearly two-thirds of serious workplace injuries involve musculoskeletal strain from repetitive tasks (BLS SOII, 2023). In print environments, lifting heavy paper, loading substrates, and trimming can lead to chronic back and joint pain. Ergonomic workstations, carts, lifts, and lifting technique training can reduce these injuries and keep employees healthy.

NOISE AND HEARING LOSS

Busy pressrooms frequently exceed safe noise levels, and prolonged exposure without protection can cause irreversible damage. While roughly 15% of American adults report hearing issues, rates increase with age, often due to prolonged noise exposure (NIDCD, 2024). Although these figures reflect the general population, workplace noise remains a major contributor. Posting warnings, enforcing hearing protection, and rotating staff in high-noise zones can reduce risk.

ELECTRICAL HAZARDS

Electrical incidents result in about 4,000 workplace injuries and 300 fatalities annually across U.S. industries, many within manufacturing environments (Electrical Safety Foundation International, 2024). Print shops, with aging infrastructure and heavy equipment, are not immune. Panels must remain closed, damaged cords replaced immediately, and power should not be daisy-chained. Lockout/tagout must apply to all electrical work.

BLADE INJURIES

Utility knives, trimmers, and box cutters are essential tools but frequent sources of hand injuries. Cuts can be prevented by using safety knives with retractable blades, wearing cut-resistant gloves, and ensuring employees use proper techniques and remain attentive during cutting tasks.

FIRE RISKS

Inks, solvents, paper, and hot machinery create conditions that can lead to fires. Manufacturing fires, including in print environments, account for approximately 37 deaths and \$1.2 billion in damages annually (NFPA, 2023). Print shops should store flammable materials correctly, clean rags and dust frequently, and maintain equipment to prevent ignition. Functioning extinguishers, clear exits, and staff trained in emergency response are critical safeguards.

CHEMICAL EXPOSURE

Printing chemicals can cause immediate and long-term health risks if mishandled. Chemical exposure contributes to roughly 190,000 illnesses and 50,000 deaths each year in the U.S. (BLS, 2023). Proper labeling, accessible Safety Data Sheets, PPE use, ventilation, and training on safe handling and disposal are critical steps in prevention.

SLIPS AND FALLS

Slips, trips, and falls are among the most common injuries in manufacturing, leading to about 13,000 serious injuries and 140 deaths annually (BLS SOII, 2023). In print environments, moisture, paper dust, and clutter increase risk, particularly near presses and loading docks. Spills should be cleaned immediately, or areas blocked off with signage if delays occur. Mark floor changes over a quarter inch and require slip-resistant footwear to prevent injuries.

HEAT STRESS

Heat-related illness is a concern in non-air-conditioned shipping and warehouse areas. Each year, over 3,500 U.S. workers suffer heat-related injuries, with dozens of fatalities (BLS SOII, 2023). Print shops can prevent incidents by providing water and electrolytes, using fans or portable AC units, rotating staff during peak heat, and training employees to recognize heat stress symptoms.

TAKING ACTION

Preventing injuries in print shops isn't about checking a box—it's about a commitment to daily, steady improvements. Small steps, from maintaining machine guards to improving training and ergonomics, add up to a safer, more productive operation.

As safety consultant Joe Eudy states, *"When companies take small, consistent steps toward safety, they don't just reduce injuries—they build trust, accountability, and a culture where people feel valued."* Injuries are not inevitable. With awareness, leadership, and a willingness to evolve, print shop leaders can build workplaces where safety supports both people and performance.

Sources:

- Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses*, NAICS 323, 2023.
- National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD), *Hearing Loss Statistics*, 2024.
- Electrical Safety Foundation International, 2024 Data.
- National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), 2023 Data.
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023 Industry Data.