



BEING PROACTIVE VS. REACTIVE IN SAFETY

In many workplaces, incidents are only addressed after something has already gone wrong. This is known as a reactive approach. A proactive approach to safety means identifying and controlling risks before an incident occurs. This toolbox talk focuses on the difference between proactive and reactive safety, and why being proactive protects everyone.

What Is Reactive Safety?

Reactive safety means responding after an incident or near miss has already happened.

Examples include:

- Investigating accidents after injuries occur.
- Fixing hazards only after they cause problems.
- Introducing controls after damage has been done.
- Learning lessons only after something goes wrong.

While reactive actions are necessary, they do not prevent the initial incident.

What Is Proactive Safety?

Proactive safety focuses on preventing incidents before they happen.

Examples include:

- Identifying hazards before starting work.
- Conducting risk assessments.
- Following safe work procedures.
- Reporting near misses and unsafe conditions.
- Maintaining equipment regularly.
- Participating in toolbox talks and training.

Proactive safety reduces risk before it leads to injury.

Why Being Proactive Matters

A proactive approach helps to:

- Prevent injuries and illnesses.
- Reduce downtime and disruptions.
- Protect equipment and property.
- Improve overall work efficiency.
- Create a stronger safety culture.

It shifts the focus from reacting to problems to preventing them.

How to Be Proactive on Site

Workers can take simple steps to stay proactive:

- Think about hazards before starting a task.
- Keep work areas clean and organised.
- Inspect tools and equipment before use.
- Follow procedures and do not take shortcuts.
- Speak up about unsafe conditions.
- Learn from near misses and previous incidents.

Small actions taken early can prevent major incidents.

Your Responsibility

Every worker has a role in preventing incidents. Waiting for something to go wrong is not acceptable. Being proactive means taking ownership of safety and acting before hazards become dangerous.

Summary

Reactive safety deals with problems after they occur, while proactive safety prevents them from happening in the first place. By identifying hazards early, following procedures, and speaking up, workers can reduce risk and create a safer work environment. Prevention is always better than reaction.

Discussion Points

1. Can you think of an example where being proactive could have prevented an incident?
2. What proactive actions can we improve on this site?
3. Why do workers sometimes wait until something goes wrong before acting?

