

UC Monthly Safety Spotlight, February 2014

Careless Chris Conquers the World of Workplace Hazards

By: Kitty

Careless Chris paced back and forth in front of the custodial closet on the second floor of the health center, impatiently scanning the hallway for his partner. Chris was looking forward to the night's shift with great anticipation; he had a feeling that tonight would be the night when everything came together at last. The fact that he had the same feeling every evening before his shift never discouraged him, it only made him more certain that the next night would be the one when he finally met with total success.

"Hi, Chris!" Frankie called, bouncing down the hall toward him with characteristic excitement. While Chris tended to have a serious, even dour demeanor, Frankie more than counterbalanced it with his cheerfulness. They were an odd pair of diametric opposites, even to the contrast between Frankie's tall, lean build and Chris' shorter, almost stout proportions, but they did such a great job together everyone tended to speak of them as if they were a single entity.

Chris skipped returning the casual greeting and launched immediately into the idea that preoccupied him, his voice deep and persuasive. "Tonight, we're going to find every single hazard in this workplace and make it completely safe." Gleefully he rubbed his hands together, unwittingly imitating countless movie villains. "I have an infallible plan. Are you ready?"

"Ha, I'm always ready! Tell me the plan and let's get started!" Nobody knew where Frankie's endless store of energy came from but everyone envied his unfailing ability to enjoy everything he did.

"It's called..." he paused dramatically for effect, "the Injury and Illness Prevention Program! We will refer to it as the IIPP."

"Are you sure we can say that at work?" Frankie asked cautiously, eyes darting sideways to check for potentially disapproving eavesdroppers.

"Your acronym anxiety is misplaced. The important element right now is that we will inspect the workplace, address the hazards we find, and keep records detailing our accomplishments." Chris carefully checked off items on a clipboard. "You've had the necessary training?"

Frankie saluted sloppily. "Yup! I know and understand my rights and responsibilities under the IIPP." The solemn effect was spoiled by him whispering to himself, "Pee-pee!" followed by a fit of high-pitched giggling that Chris judiciously ignored with the ease of long practice.

They had the cleaning cart out and were checking the containers on it when Chris' system met its first challenge. "Looks like we need to refill the spray bottles of Shiny-Brite again. You do remember the correct dilution?"

"We go through it so quickly." Frankie reached for the large two-gallon container of it on the chemical shelf and his face brightened with an idea. "If I put it in at full strength, we can use less and not have to keep refilling these," he suggested. "That would be more efficient, and you like efficiency, don't you?"

"Efficiency is never a good reason for doing something unsafe," Chris disagreed severely, his expressive eyebrows lowering. He reached for the Safety Data Sheet binder next to the shelf and quickly paged through it. "According to this, at full strength it's classified 1B for skin corrosion and irritation, and 1 for serious eye damage. I hardly think we want to be spritzing it around without diluting it to a safe level first. You do remember our recent update on the hazard communication program, right?"

"Sure do! One is the new four! Five is the new one! Yay, GHS!" A glance at the still-lowered eyebrows was fortunately sufficient to forestall another episode of giggling.

"It's still a 3, but yes, it's also a 1 now." Initially resigned, Chris began to sound pedantic as he intoned, "That's why understanding the labeling is critical. The point being, proper use and handling remains paramount and that's dependent on understanding and following the instructions." He handed the bottle to Frankie, watching to ensure the directions were followed with scrupulous care. When the task had been successfully completed, he ostentatiously placed another couple marks on his checklist and led the way to their first assigned space.

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They surveyed the break room from the doorway and noted the floor had the usual assortment of new coffee stains, but Chris spotted the gleam of a large puddle of water by the sink and raised his arm quickly to block Frankie from walking on into the room. "Are you wondering what I'm wondering?" he asked, quiet delight at an unexpected opportunity lighting his voice.

"I think so," Frankie replied, following his own internal logic carefully before trying to clarify the one point that he wasn't sure of. "But if the elevator is out of service, shouldn't we leave the frozen gorilla on the loading dock instead?"

The brief, spasmodic twitching over Chris' left eyebrow was the only sign he found the question disturbing. "Let's leave the gorilla out of this for the moment and focus on the immediate issue. What injury is the puddle of water likely to cause?"

"Oooh, ooh, I know!" Frankie waved one arm in the air with happy abandon. "Pick me! I know!"

One hand over his eyes as if suffering infinite existential pain, Chris sighed theatrically. "Yes, Frankie?"

"I could slip in it and fall and break something! That would be bad, right?"

"All a matter of opinion, I'm sure. But yes, let's assume it would be bad. Very bad. What should we do about it?"

"Mop it up!" Frankie answered with gratifying promptness.

"But first...." Chris prompted.

"Umm.... signs! We need to make sure nobody wanders in."

"Yes!" Chris grinned and handed the mop to Frankie once the warning cones had been placed to his satisfaction. It took only a few moments to sop up the water and ensure the floor was dry enough to walk on safely before picking up the safety signs, completing their cleaning, and moving on to their next target, the restroom.

As the door swung open they both paused, noses wrinkling at what they saw on the floor against the back wall. Its acrid smell was as distinctive as its instantly identifiable look. "Barf!" Frankie expostulated.

"Yes, it is." Chris narrowed his eyes as he inspected the disgusting mess but the calm tone of disapproval in his voice admitted no defeat. "We're going to need our PPE for this one."

"Particularly Pretty Extravagances?" Frankie asked in open puzzlement.

"No, those would only be decorative and of no use in our present mission. I meant Personal Protective Equipment, our last line of defense in hazardous situations." Chris took out a pair of waterproof gloves for himself and handed another pair to his partner, then chose two pairs of splash-proof goggles for them. Unable to deny himself the pleasure of an appropriate dramatic flourish, he snapped the gloves as he put them on.

"Oh, *that* PPE," Frankie said loftily. "I knew that." Quickly attired in his own gear, he went to work with his customary energy and even the nastiest job of the evening was soon behind them.

Throughout the night's shift as they made their rounds they inspected diligently in accordance with the checklist. As they identified, categorized, and solved each hazard they encountered, they felt a measurable sense of accomplishment. Even the broken glass by the rear entrance posed no threat to their well-prepared approach and considered use of the right tools to avoid any chance of exposing themselves to a chance cut. By the time they returned to their starting point and put away their equipment, they were justifiably certain they had not only avoided injury to themselves but had saved other people from potential incidents as well. Even better, they had the documentation to prove it and knew they could reliably do it again.

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"That was great, Chris," Frankie enthused as they locked the last door behind them, ebullient with their success.

"Indeed, it was most satisfying. See you tomorrow night."

"Why, what are we going to do tomorrow night?"

"Same thing we do every night: safety!" Chris' voice rang with sincere, boundless ambition. "Try to make over our workplace!"