

Stop Work Authority (SWA)

Every worker has the authority, responsibility, and one might say the obligation, to immediately stop the job if they observe or perceive unsafe acts or conditions that are a direct threat to themselves and others, as well as to equipment and the operations.

When a person stops the job and intervenes it may be seen by others around them as confrontational, and many of us tend to shy away for a varying number of reasons, including: differing opinions of what “safe” looks like, the relationship or lack of relationship with co-workers, the difficulty in intervening with a more senior person, not wanting to interrupt productivity, and a fear of what others may think.

To overcome any reluctance, we must create a “safety” culture where people are positively recognized for utilizing stop work and are not fearful of “payback” / punishment. Additionally, there must be a clear understanding of what “safe” looks like for the tasks being undertaken, through such measures as training, procedures, mentoring, and job safety and hazard analysis.

A new employee to the wind industry recently shared an incident that happened to him and a coworker:

The two workers were tasked with performing a blade inspection. As they began entering, Technician 1 (the new worker) had both legs in and was standing up as he did so the blade unexpectedly pitched, moving one degree. When this occurred Technician 1's right foot was sitting between very large bolts that were arranged in a ring

around the perimeter of the blade, attaching it to the spinner. As the blade pitched, it took his foot with it but being that it only pitched one degree, the Technician was not injured. The potential for his foot to be severely wrenched or even taken off if the blade had pitched further, was clearly there.

The Technicians immediately left the blade and radioed back to the Technical Field Advisor (TFA) who was controlling the electronic lockout of the rotor and blade, to report this incident and discuss what happened. It turned out the TFA had inadvertently pitched the blade, but this was not the only reason for this incident. As stated by the new Technician: “I knew we were not properly prepared to do this job and I should have said so. Although I have been trained in general LOTO, I had never been trained in the specific procedure for locking out this type of turbine and despite my coworker being more experienced than me, neither had he. Neither of us had even read it nor was it made available to us. This should have been discussed at the job safety analysis because looking at the procedure, all three of us did not follow the proper steps. This just shows we were not properly prepared. I should have known better!”

We all have personally experienced incidents where we knew “things” were not quite right but we let the task continue, and of course we have all heard about plenty more of these types of incidents. It is critical all personnel understand and feel they have the authority to stop the work at any time where they recognize unsafe acts and conditions.

If you see a risk and walk away, then hope you never have to say, I could have saved a life that day, but I chose to look the other way.