



MAFES DAWG TRACKS

How many times have we heard “slow down and pay attention”? While usually directed toward children, it really is good advice for us adults too. A large portion of accidents, both in the workplace and in everyday life, can be attributed to going too fast to maintain control of the situation or not being observant of your surroundings.

So how fast is too fast? That depends on the conditions and your abilities ...

If you are talking about the speed you can physically do a job, it depends on your experience, tools to do the job, and body’s acclimation to the conditions.

- Are you rushing and taking short-cuts that increase your risk and exposure to hazards?
- Are there constant interruption or breakdowns causing continuous distractions?
- Can your body handle the stress?
Physically - The weather/temperature and number of movements your body has to perform can be limiting.
Mentally - Are deadline realistic and do you have the support of your co-workers and supervisors to perform the task?

More often, too fast is associated with vehicles and equipment. Running at higher speeds affects all equipment. It can result in increased wear on parts, resulting in needed repairs and decreased lifespan for the machine. More worrisome, with higher speeds, is the increased probability of a crash. This is mostly due to the simple fact that we as humans are limited in our capacity to process information and act on it. When something starts going wrong, you have less time to react or a chance of correction, than if the same thing happens at a slower speed.

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While seatbelts and other safety features greatly increase your chance of survival, the higher the collision speed, the more serious the consequences in terms of injury and material damage. Many limitations such as the capabilities of equipment, the load being carried, the type and condition of tires, operating surface conditions, and total environmental should be taken into consideration when determining safe speeds at a workplace.

A large portion of working safely is being aware of your surroundings – pay attention! Be engaged and observant in your workplace.

Look around to know what objects, people, and circumstances are ever-changing nearby. Don’t be texting & playing on your phone while doing work task or driving vehicles & equipment, stay focused.

Being able to hear what is going on is equally important. Some job tasks should not allow headphones or earbuds to be worn at all. If operating equipment or working around animals, this is especially true. You need to always be able to hear surrounding sounds and warning signals. For example:

- Is there a new or unusual noise while operating equipment?
- Is that animal running charging at you, or just being playful nearby?
- Is a co-worker hollering “Watch out!”
- Is the fire alarm going off or a building announcement being made?
- Has an un-welcome visitor walked into the shop/office/lab?

Safe speeds, looking, and listening in your workplace will give you a better opportunity to be proactive in a hazardous situation with possible time for correction, rather than a panicked reaction.

Sources:

<https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/standardinterpretations/2004-11-04>
<https://nfiu.org/farmsafety/>
https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/speedmgmt/ref_mats/fhwasa1304/Resources3/08%20-%20The%20Relation%20Between%20Speed%20and%20Crashes.pdf
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