Hierarchy of Controls

Hierarchy of Controls Safety Talk

There are multiple safeguards to control any one hazard. Each level of these safeguards serves to protect employees. Some safeguards or controls are more effective than others. The hierarchy of controls outlines the controls used to mitigate a hazard from most effective to least effective.

The hierarchy can have additional or less levels of controls listed depending on the reference you are looking at. The hierarchy we will discuss is listed as: elimination, substitution, engineering controls, administrative controls, and PPE in our example.

Hierarchy of Controls Example

To better understand the hierarchy of controls we will provide a real world example. The example: A painter will apply a paint with a high level of VOCs to a metal surface in a factory.

Elimination: **Eliminate the hazard**. Paint example: The process can be outsourced or completed by an automated process to take the painter out of the situation.

Substitution: Substitute a more hazardous process or chemical with a less hazardous one. Paint example: Use paint with a lower VOC content to protect the painter. There is almost always a less hazardous option when dealing with chemicals.

Engineering: Engineer out hazards. For example- equipment guards, physical barriers, isolation, ventilation systems etc. are examples are engineering controls. Paint example: Apply the paint in a paint booth with a proper ventilation system. This will help protect the painter as well as other employees in the factory.

Administrative: Administrative controls are things such as job training, job rotation, breaks, company policies, etc. Paint example: Train the painter to safely complete the task. Another example- use job rotations or breaks to limit the painter's exposure to the paint.

PPE: Personal protective equipment covers items such as gloves, respirators, steel toe shoes, safety glasses, and ear plugs. Paint example: Provide a respirator that will protect the painter from the fumes of the paint. Also provide goggles to protect the eyes and some type of coveralls to protect the skin.

We should always strive to eliminate as many hazards as possible. If elimination is not possible then other controls lower on the hierarchy should be implemented to protect

employees. PPE is always a last resort and should never be looked at as a primary control for a hazard. The more safeguards in place for a hazard the least likely an incident will occur. Always verify controls are in place and never just assume that they are.

Discussion points:

-Give me some examples of controls and where they would fall on the hierarchy of controls.

-Are we relying on a less effective safeguard instead of eliminating the hazard or implementing an engineering control during a work task onsite?