



# Safety Article

## Superman Can't Fly

by Gary W. Hanson, President of American Safety and Health Management Consultants, Inc.

I grew up in the 1960's when the original Superman series was on television every day. Like most young boys of that time, I wished that I could have supernatural powers. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have the ability to jump tall buildings in a single bound, be faster than a speeding bullet and be more powerful than a locomotive. Hours and hours of play time were devoted to playing Superman.

When I got older and came of age to drive and hanging out with other friends, I went through a transition stage. No longer was I listening to the good advice offered by my Mother, instead my friends became the major influence in my life. We all vied to convince each other how that we weren't Mama's Boys. Taking risks was a part of the passing rights to manhood. No one wanted to be called a sissy. We were young and full of life and we all thought we would live forever.

Accidents happened to other people. For some reason we felt immune to the normal laws of physics. Every time we took a risk and got away with it our belief grew stronger. As we grew older and started to go to work, we carried this attitude with us. In fact, all young people have that attitude, I call it the Superman Syndrome. It affects our behavior and attitude.

As we get older, we come to realize that there is Kryptonite out there. We aren't as immune from accidents or injuries as we once believed. Unfortunately, it can be a slow process but eventually we all come to realize that Superman Can't Fly.

Injury statistics show that one third of all new employees will have an accident within the first year of their employment. If employees are left on their own they often make decisions that put their safety at risk. The more often they are exposed, the more likely an injury will take place. They develop bad safety habits which become repeatable over and over again. After a short while, they perform the act without even thinking about it. Too many learn the hard way that Superman Can't Fly.

Even older employees aren't immune. Behavior learned early in life can carry on throughout life. I have investigated dozens of serious accidents where I have heard from the injured employee that I have done this 10,000 times. Unfortunately, it only takes once and your life can change forever.

As an employer, it is important to understand the dynamics of Superman Syndrome and how to impact employee's thinking and attitudes. Safety is a Behavioral Science and it will only be successful if you can get employees to perform every task in a safe manner.

That starts with the following:

- Safe Job Procedures
- Effective Employee Training
- Understanding Why Employees Behave the Way they Do
- Constant Follow Up and Observations
- Correction of Unsafe Conditions
- Correction of Unsafe Work Behavior
- Enforcement, Enforcement & Enforcement

Companies with good Safety Programs realize this. They understand that Safety Behavior can be molded and it starts when an employee first starts with a company. It also starts with the understanding that we all have Superman Syndrome. Safety has to be a key management priority and this must be communicated to all employees constantly. Don't let one of your employees learn that Superman Can't Fly the hard way.

If you have any questions or need any help with your Safety Program, please give me a call at 1-800-356-1274.

**CAUTION CAUTION CAUTION**