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## The 'POINT OF NO RETURN' Taking Unnecessary Risks

Do you know where this phrase came from? It describes the point at which an aircraft crossing ocean or wilderness no longer has sufficient fuel to return to the starting point and so must go on, no matter what hazards may lie ahead. It now refers to the stage of any action at which, come what may, it's too late to turn back.

It can be applied to many situations affecting health and safety. A simple example is leaning back too far in a chair: pass the point of no return, and a tip and fall result. Staying out in the sun too long is another instance, and a painful burn can be the outcome.

Why do people go beyond this point of no return? Because they've been lucky enough to get away with it before. I confess there have been times when I've done so myself, but fortunately I wised up to that bad habit before it got me into real danger. I know that some of you, too, have gone beyond the point of safe return as you went about your daily tasks here and at home.

At least one of you has almost certainly been guilty—probably more than once—of taking each one of the following risks:

- Driving just one more trip with bald tires
- Delaying or ignoring first aid measures for a minor injury
- Forcing the wrench a little bit more
- Reaching too close to a moving belt
- Wearing your safety glasses around your neck, not over your eyes.

You all know what could happen as a result, but each time the potential bad outcome doesn't occur, you begin to think it never will—and that's a sure recipe for disaster.

Like OSHA's regulations, the company's safety rules were developed to prevent disastrous harm to product, property, and, most of all, people—meaning you. But rules don't protect people; people protect themselves and each other by observing the rules, by following safe and healthy work practices without having to be reminded constantly.

Part of my job is making sure you understand what our safety rules are and why they are necessary for your protection—in other words, what hazards they are intended to forestall. That's why we have these regular safety talks. It's also why those who repeatedly ignore the rules, endangering themselves and possibly others, are subject to disciplinary action.

Sound harsh? Consider the alternative. Let's imagine a worker who has regularly been bypassing the guard on his machine—without incident. The supervisor has delivered several verbal reminders, then issued a written reprimand. The next time that worker is seen bypassing the guard, the result is a day's suspension without pay. But passing that point of no return and reaching the point of operation could have cost a finger or hand—certainly a far more horrendous loss than a day's wages.

So consider this a "wake-up call" or perhaps a "wise-up call." Next time you're tempted to take a shortcut around the prescribed way of doing things, or to ignore a safety rule "just this once" or "just for a minute," stop yourself. Consider the very real risks—what could happen even if it has never happened before. Then step back from the edge of that point of no return, and do the smart thing—the safe thing.