

*2018 NSC Congress & Expo – Opening Session remarks for Debbie Hersman*

**TITLE:** What Do You See and What Are You Going to Do About It?

It's incredible to see thousands of safety professionals committed to keeping everyone safe and sound.

At the National Safety Council, we talk a lot about our moonshot goal of eliminating preventable deaths in our lifetime. Well, this city knows a thing or two about moonshots. When the lunar shuttle touched down, the first word uttered by Neil Armstrong was – "HOUSTON."

It was Houston, and the NASA engineers, tirelessly working to perfect their calculations and outcomes that made the lunar landing possible.

While we're not putting people on the moon, with a 7-year high in workplace fatalities, we've got a lot of work to do.

We are so excited to partner with the Houston Area Safety Council as they become an official NSC chapter this week.

They are doing the crucial work of preparing people to work safely.

As you know, safety professionals aren't born, they are trained. And it takes training to see hazards clearly.

How many of you wear glasses or contacts? Show of hands.

How many of you remember what it felt like the first time you put them on?

Were you surprised by how much you couldn't see before?

If you're anything like me, you probably got lulled into thinking – that's the way the world is supposed to look.

Blurry road signs at night, fuzzy patches of green where individual leaves might be, these became my new normal.

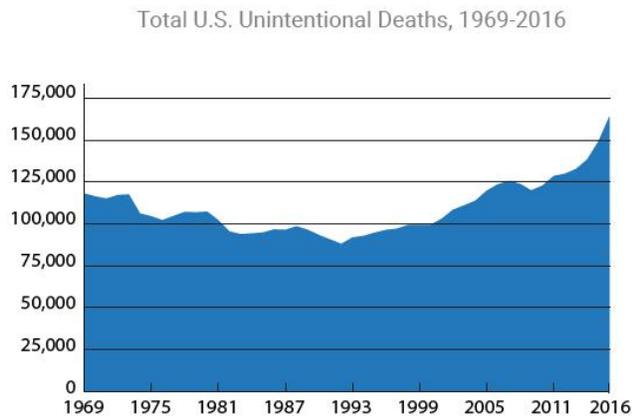


But the small act of putting on my glasses for the first time helped me see things as I should have seen them before.

At least that was my experience being nearsighted.

Things go out of focus so slowly we don't realize we're actually losing our vision.

The same goes for safety. If we continue to do things the wrong or unsafe way without consequence, we stop seeing the hazards.



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Preventable injuries are now the 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of death.

For the first time in recorded history, more people in the prime of their lives are dying from preventable causes than ever before.

We are becoming blind to everyday hazards.

We are becoming complacent.

We are rolling back protections for workers, increasing speed limits, and turning a blind eye to common risks like falls.

For everyone here this week, your job is to make sure safety is not an afterthought, but the first thing people think of, the first thing we look out for.

The problem is, we're often not seeing the whole picture.

The Center for Visual Expertise or COVE has created an innovative training program to help workers see hazards clearly, and we've brought it here to Congress.

Visit the NSC Booth on the Expo floor for what we're calling the "Experience in Seeing Safety." You'll see for yourself what visual literacy is all about.

Let's do an exercise together:



What do you see? Can anyone spot the hazard in this image?



What do you see now?

Let's go back to the black and white image.



I bet you all saw the leopard jumping out of the screen after you saw the image in color. The amazing thing about visual literacy is that once you learn to see the hazard, it's much harder to un-see it.



Construction workers at 30 Rockefeller Plaza in New York City, 1932



I bet everyone here can identify the hazards in this famous photo.

It's easy, right? Because you have been trained on the importance of hard hats and fall protection. We have learned to see those hazards clearly.



Construction workers in Los Angeles, working on the Wilshire Grand Tower, 2016



Now it may be a little harder to spot the hazards in the modern workplace. They're not as obvious.

Factors like distraction and fatigue have an extraordinary impact, yet aren't always visible to the naked eye.

As we become more sophisticated, the hazard cues become more subtle. We have to develop a deeper understanding of what causes or contributes to risk.

Beyond just spotting the hazard, visual literacy leads us to ask three key questions:

- What do you see?
- What does it mean?
- And, most importantly, what are you going to do about it?

Motor vehicle crashes are the #1 cause of workplace fatalities.

And in Texas, there hasn't been a day without a traffic fatality since November 7, 2000. Not a single day. A recent Houston Chronicle investigation has found that Houston is the most deadly metro region in the country.

So we must look at traffic safety in a new light.

Raise your hand if your drive to work looks like this:



For those of us that drive every day, we become blind to the risks.

But if you are a traffic safety professional, you can see them clearly – the risk of a side-impact or a head-on collision.

Thank about the hierarchy of controls – you do everything you can to eliminate or design out the hazard.

In a typical 4-way intersection, there are 32 ways a crash can happen,



But a roundabout cuts that down to just 8.

Believe it or not, this is the same intersection you saw earlier, redesigned with safety in mind.

While many people think roundabouts are frustrating, they are actually much safer.



The road on the left is familiar, but in a safe system the roundabout eliminates the opportunity for a really serious crash to occur.

Everyone drives slower, there's no light to beat, and traffic only moves one way.

So next time you find yourself approaching a roundabout, you'll know it's built to keep you safe, because you can see it clearly.

Until 2013, motor vehicle crashes were the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S.



But the opioid epidemic is now the most significant public health crisis of our time.

The signs were hidden in plain sight for well over a decade before we started paying attention.

We can't ignore it any longer.

70% of our workplaces have been impacted by substance use.

One out of every four Americans has been directly affected by opioids.

And for the people in this room who have lost someone they love, it's personal.

The problem is - people don't see something familiar, like a bottle of pills, as potentially deadly.

We know a prescription after an injury is often how people get hooked, setting off a chain reaction of addiction that has devastated families and communities across the country.

Last year, we built a travelling memorial to the victims of the opioid crisis.

The personal stories shared in the memorial have opened the eyes of millions across the country.

We are proud to bring the Prescribed to Death memorial here to Houston at the Congress & Expo. You probably saw it when you walked in this morning.

It portrays the faces of thousands of people lost to prescription opioids in just one year, but as the numbers continue to grow, the numbers themselves don't tell the whole story.

The memorial brings us face-to-face with an everyday killer. It also provides solutions to help us eliminate preventable deaths.

Remember our three guiding questions: What do you see? What does it mean? And what are you going to do about it?

Well here's what we are going to do about it.

I am not going to just tell you about it.

Let's play the video.

You can do something about this TODAY.

When you walked in this morning, you found a card like THIS on your seat:



Please pull out your insurance card, and place a ‘Warn Me’ label on it.

These labels signal that you want to have a conversation with your health care provider about alternative, safer options.

Please, please talk to your loved ones, and share the ‘Warn Me’ labels with them.

I also urge you to visit the Memorial after Opening Session to learn more about this epidemic.

70% of employers in the nation are now affected by the opioid crisis. Talk to your leadership, and order these cards for your employees.

Once we truly see something, we cannot un-see it.

We all have a responsibility to keep each other safe, at work, at home, and on the road.

We’ve talked about being able to see hazards, but some not only see hazards, they put their own lives on the line to save others.

First responders are often the unseen and unsung heroes.

Thank you to everyone here in Houston and other hard hit areas around the country that have stepped up in times of crisis.



Houston Police SWAT officer Daryl Hudeck carries Catherine Pham and her 13-month-old son Aiden



Like this officer who probably carried out many rescues before this picture was taken, as safety professionals you are often working behind the scenes.

While you are held accountable when something goes wrong, you don't hear about it when everything goes right.

So this week is about recognizing YOU and making your impact visible.

You can see hazards that others miss.

You keep people safe.

Once your focus is clear, you make those hazards visible to others.

In my book, that makes you the unsung heroes in our workplaces.

Thank you for all you do. Have a great Congress!