

Living Through Life Safely
By Wm R. Griffin, President
Cleaning Consultant Services, Inc.

When most people think about window cleaners and safety, the first thing that comes to mind is falling off a building or a ladder. No one would disagree that falls are dangerous and serious business. However, I'd venture to say that over all, window cleaners, although adventurous, are a pretty safe group and not that many are killed or injured each year falling off of buildings. What kills most window cleaners is not the spectacular 40-story fall, but the small stuff, and I don't mean a fall from 10 feet. These small things sneak up on and kill millions of people every year, and some of them are window cleaners and small business owners, just like you.

For the most part, safety in the work place is getting better each year, with fewer workers killed on the job than ever before. The most recent year for which there are statistics is 1997, when 5606 workers died from work related injuries. Every one of those 5606 workers went to work in the morning, as usual, expecting to come home to dinner and a kiss at the end of the day. Unfortunately for them and their loved ones, they were delayed when reality caught up with them some where along the way. Everyone agrees, 5606 deaths on the job is 5606 too many. We know that. And in case we forget, OSHA and 27 state safety agencies are here to remind us.

When you look at the numbers of how most Americans die, it's not on the job. Staying safe on the job is actually fairly easy. Living through life is what kills us. It's the personal lifestyle choices that we make each day about how we live our lives that will determine how long we will live, as well as the quality of our lives. In most cases it's not a matter of breaking the law, it's a matter of doing what's best for us. And even though it can be a matter of life and death, it's not always easy to make the right choices, even when we know what's best for our health.

2, 324,245 Americans died in 1997. And here's what killed them: The Top Ten List.

1. Heart Disease: 726, 974 deaths
2. Cancer: 539, 577
3. Stroke: 159, 791
4. Pulmonary Disease: 109, 029
5. Accidents: 95, 844
6. Pneumonia/Influenza: 86, 449
7. Diabetes: 62, 636
8. Suicide: 30, 535
9. Nephritis: 25, 331
10. Liver disease/Cirrhosis 25, 175

Life expectancy

The good news is that if you don't kill yourself one way or another, you have a pretty good chance of living to the ripe old age of 76.5 years, with women living a little longer to 79.4 years. The average life expectancy for Americans has continued to increase since the mid 1800's when it was about 40 years of age.

And what's really exciting is that recent advances in medical science are expected to increase the average life expectancy to as much as 120 year with in the next 50 years. The bad news is that most of us won't live long enough to benefit from those advances.

The Small Stuff that Kills Us

For the most part it's common sense, but we get so busy living life that we often forget to apply what we know. Here are some examples:

The Sun

Wearing sunscreen when working outdoors in the sun. The ultra violet rays of the sun are well known for causing skin cancer. Over 41,600 new cases in 1998, with an estimated 9,200 deaths. The next time you're enjoying the weather and thinking about how lucky you are to have a profession that allows you to work out doors, in the fresh air and sun shine, take a minute to apply a dab of sun screen in the appropriate places. That's safer than telling yourself it's not a problem, I've been doing it for years.

Let's Go For A Ride

Another common killer is automobile accidents, 43, 458 deaths in 1997, with over 4, 277,000 emergency room visits for related injuries. Driving defensively, wearing your seat belt, and making sure your vehicle is mechanically sound will reduce these numbers.

Give Me A Beer

Alcohol is another killer. We are all pretty familiar with the problems of drinking, driving and getting caught. If you are lucky, you just lose your license for six months, go to drunk school on weekends for a year, spend one day in jail and get a \$5000 fine. If your unlucky, you kill a family (maybe your own), end up in a wheel chair, get charged with vehicular homicide and win free room and board for 10 years in state prison. In 1997, there were 19, 576 alcohol-induced deaths; not counting 8,563 alcohol related motor fatalities. There were also another 25, 175 deaths from chronic liver disease and Cirrhosis, both of which are commonly attributed to alcohol abuse.

And while were in the neighborhood, illegal drug use resulted in 14, 843 deaths in 1996 and 142, 164 cocaine related emergency room episodes in 1995. Everybody likes to have a good time. However, moderation is a safer and healthier approach. If you're out of control, get help before it's too late.

One of the problems with addiction is that you're thought process is so confused that you don't think you have a problem. The reality is that if your work is negatively affected and your personal life centers around drugs and alcohol you're in trouble and need help. Reach for a lifeline now, it's only going to get worse if you don't do something about it.

Smoking

Twenty-seven percent of all men over 18 smoke cigarettes and 37% of high school drop outs smoke. The only ones who don't see the connection between health problems and death from smoking are the tobacco companies. The next time you reach for a cigarette or cough up some of that chewy green stuff, think about the people you see

rolling around those little green tanks of oxygen with the plastic tube that goes up their nose.

And don't forget the 171,500 new cases of lung cancer diagnosed each year, or the 160,000 people who will die from lung cancer this year. How to avoid it, stop now. Put those cigarettes down and make a personal commitment to never let a cigarette touch your lips again. Personally I've always thought there were better uses for my lips than smoking.

The Food We Eat

We love to eat, give me two big Mac's with cheese, a biggy fry and a jumbo Dr. Pepper. Makes my mouth water just thinking about it. Now think about this, 54% of adults are overweight and 14% of children are over weight. The average weight and height for man today is 5 ft, 9 inches and 180 pounds, that amounts to a 6% increase in the average weight over the last ten years. If you're overweight it will have a negative impact on your life and health: such as life expectancy, back, heart and breathing problems. Not to mention mental health problems and limits on physical exertion.

In 1994, 19% of Americans had High Serum Cholesterol, with the mean level being, mg/dL: 203. In 1995 there were 16.6 million office visits to physicians for Cholesterol reduction. There is a Spanish saying that goes something like this; A fish dies by its mouth, and I would say that applies to humans as well.

Another side of the food issue is food poisoning. I used to say I would eat anything, now I'm a little pickier. There are approximately 250 different food borne illnesses described and probably also a good number that we don't know about yet. The most common symptoms are vomiting and diarrhea. It estimated that there are at least 6 million and possibly as many as 80 million food borne infections and intoxication's in the USA each year, with an estimated 9000 deaths. Medical cost and lost wages have been estimated at one billion dollars per year. If it doesn't look, smell or taste good, don't eat it.

Exercise

Physical activity plays a key role in living a long and healthy life. Being physically inactive is a serious nationwide problem. Sixty percent of adults do not achieve the recommended amount of physical activity and 25% are not active at all, and inactivity increases with age. Yet no one is too old to enjoy the benefits of regular physical activity.

There are three important points here:

1. People who are usually inactive can improve their health and well being by becoming even moderately active on a regular basis.
2. Physical activity need not be strenuous to achieve health benefits.
3. Greater health benefits can be achieved by increasing the amount (duration, frequency and intensity) of physical activity.

Regular daily physical activity improves health in the following ways:

- Reduces the risk of dying prematurely
- Reduces the risk of dying from heart disease
- Reduces the risk of developing diabetes and high blood pressure
- Reduces the risk of developing colon cancer

- Lowers high blood pressure
- Reduces feelings of depression, anxiety and promotes psychological well being
- Helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints

How's your exercise program coming?

Mental Health

There were 31.8 million visits to physicians for mental disorders in 1996, 1.9 million for schizophrenic issues, 4.7 million for depression and 4.3 million for anxiety. In 1997 there were 1,16 million divorces in the USA.

Violence

This can be in our personal lives or on the job. Our society has become much more violent than in the past and over the last ten years there has been a considerable increase in work related violence. This should be kept in mind when dealing with customers as well as when hiring, disciplining and terminating employees. In 1997 there were 32, 436 fire arm deaths in the USA, of these 18, 846 were homicides, which is the 14th leading cause of death.

Health Issues

The leading cause of death in 1996 was heart disease. There are 2.6 million cases of prostate disease reported annually and 32, 891 men died from it in 1997. Over 90% of prostate cancer is curable if caught in its early stages. Over 90% of all men have some form of prostate disease by age 90.

When was the last time the doctor told you to bend over and cough? Maybe it's time for a visit, it could save your life.

Men made 300 million visits to the Doctors office in 1995, the emergency room 42 million times, accounted for 26 million out patient visits and had 16 million surgical procedures performed. The most common chronic condition was Sinusitis; the most common acute condition was Influenza. The bad news is that as many as 98,000 deaths each year are attributed to medical mistakes made in hospitals and doctors offices.

Nearly 60% of all men visited the dentist at least once during the last year. It is interesting too that the more education a person has, the more likely they are to go to the dentist, under 12 years education 38%, over 13 years 74%.

Sex

Now were talking, let's get down to the good stuff. We used to say a little sex would never hurt you, boy has that changed. These days if you're sleeping around with out using protection, you are playing Russian roulette with a loaded gun.

Hears the numbers for sexually transmitted diseases (STD's). In 1996: 52, 995 cases of Syphilis, 490, 000 cases of Chlamydia, 325, 883 cases of Gonorrhea and 58, 254 new cases of AIDS/HIV, with 16, 516 deaths annually. STD's are on the increase and the list goes on. Bottom line, wear your rubbers or keep it in your pants.

Infectious Diseases

10, 637 cases of Hepatitis B in 1996, 22, 327 cases of TB and 45, 471 cases of Salmonella. Your best protection against infection is wearing gloves and frequent hand washing. After that, keep your hand away from your eyes, nose, mouth and other body openings. If you get a cut or abrasion, clean it promptly with a germ-killing agent and cover it with a Band-Aid. If it's serious or does not look like it's healing or is getting worse after a couple of days, see a doctor immediately.

There are some really nasty strains of pathogenic organisms showing up, such as flesh eating bacteria, antibiotic resistant staph/strep and others that we don't even have names for yet. If you think you're sick, don't second-guess yourself, your body knows and is trying to tell you something, listen to it. Go to the emergency room or your doctor immediately, a day can make the difference between life and death. I know it can be a tough call, when money is tight.

Once, I was in the hospital for a kidney stone. The doctor told me the procedure would cost \$7000.00. I asked him if my insurance would cover all that? He looked me in the eye and asked me. What difference does it make? You'll die without it. He had a point and since that day, I haven't worried about medical costs. I can always file for bankruptcy if I have to.

Cell Phones

Although the evidence is mixed, there are some experts who believe that the use of cell phones, next to the head can cause or increase the chance of brain cancer. I'm not a scientist, so I don't have any facts, other than that I've know several people who used a cell phone a lot and mysteriously got and died from brain cancer.

I now use an ear phone and lapel microphone with my cell phone. And it's a lot safer when driving as I don't need to hold the phone and I can dial with voice activation.

Ergonomics

This is another controversial issue. OSHA has proposed new regulations designed to prevent what used to be known as repetitive stress injuries (RSI). The name has now been changed to musculoskeletal disorders (MSD's). The basic concept is that repeat motions, heat, vibration, awkward or static posture, constant pressure, among other things cause body parts to wear out. Regardless of whether this becomes law or not, these are issues you need to be aware of and possibly alter your work pattern to avoid unnecessary and preventable risks to yourself and workers.

Let's Review

Don't forget the obvious. Slip, trip and fall protection, chemical and electrical shock hazards, MSDS sheets, first aid kits, personal protective equipment (PPE), employee training, and awareness, along with some common sense will help prevent accidents and injuries on the job. It's the law and we as a profession have a moral obligation to protect our employees as well as our own health so we may enjoy a long, full and productive life.

What the numbers say is that very few window cleaners will meet their maker falling off a building. It's how you live your life that will kill you before your time. And just like knowing how to properly tie off a safety line on a building will keep you from hitting the ground should you fall. There are things you can do that will help assure that

you make it home at the end of the day for dinner and a kiss. The hard part is not only knowing what's right, it's doing what's right that is difficult.

Certainly there are some things we can't prevent. We call them acts of god. When your time is up, the game goes back in the box. It's over, that's all there is to it. But there's no use rushing it. Now you've got the facts, the rest is up to you. Good luck, good health and keep it clean.

F: artsafetylife