

“Stay Safe” – Is it the New “Have a Nice Day”?

Article By:

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When I was a kid, Californians, particularly those from SoCal, would be teased for their standard way of saying goodbye to people in person or on the phone – “Have a nice day!” Even in today’s text message society, texts often close with the yellow “smiley face” emoji. There’s been significant debate too about whether this phrase is “rude” by commanding someone to have a nice day rather than as it is largely intended, to *wish* someone a nice day.

In a COVID-19 world, I’ve found that “have a nice day” has been supplanted by “stay safe.” In just a few weeks, our focus has shifted from a desire for a pleasant experience to a safe one, which recognizes that something many people simply have taken for granted, our health and safety, is not a given in our current world.

As an environmental, health, and safety lawyer who has worked for 30 years in the oil, gas, and chemical industries, I’m pleased to see this focus on health and safety – that’s our mantra – our careers and our lives are about improving the health and safety of people.

The COVID-19 health crisis has brought to the forefront of our collective consciousness the importance of putting safety first, including by social distancing, sheltering in place, and minimizing contact for those people engaged in essential businesses, like those working in the food supply chain, the oil and gas industry, healthcare, and other critical infrastructure sectors.

It also highlights how complex even simple aspects of being safe can be. As I struggle to get preteens and teenagers to distance or follow other rules, when their natural inclination is to connect and engage with each other, to hug, to shake hands, to play games that involve contact, it calls to mind the challenges that companies face in employees’ natural instincts to get a job done quickly and efficiently... even though that may diverge from the safest way to do that task. Achieving a strong “safety culture” in complex manufacturing operations is a continuous improvement process at which our clients are constantly working. And this is with employees and contractors who want to work safely. It’s easy to slip into an old habit of how you used to accomplish a task or tempting to try to get the job done more quickly.

We see the attention, commitment, and steps taken to keep everyone safe in the COVID-19 health crisis. This type of awareness and attention should be given to “routine” hazards that we face every day. We can all take a lesson from our current experience and perhaps carry forward with our new farewell phrase, “stay safe,” to remind ourselves what we are all trying to accomplish.

I sincerely and continuously wish you safety, good health, and a nice day!

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