

# "It's All Fun and Games"

by  
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Just about everyone has sat through a safety training class that they thought would never end. It probably went like this - an instructor stood in front of the room reading to you, either from slides or a handout, while you sat in an uncomfortable chair in a boring room for several hours. You might remember the instructor and the bad class but you probably remember very little about the important points presented.

How can you make sure that safety training you deliver does not end of being one of these dreaded classes? Two ways you can do this include 1) creating opportunities for interaction and 2) letting the class have fun. Training games are a great way to incorporate both fun and interaction into your classes.

Games are a great way to help teach safety concepts as long as you plan the activity carefully and properly follow up on (debrief) the activity. It is also extremely important to remember not to include a game in your class just for the sake of including a game. For example, you wouldn't want to start off a class by announcing that everyone was going to shoot some hoops or play Twister® just as a way to get the class up and moving and having some fun from the start. If they are not learning anything related to the class topic, then the game should not be included.

Most safety trainers have heard the old Confucius quote "What I hear I forget; What I see I remember; What I do, I understand". Safety games fall into that category of "doing". If the trainee can apply concepts and lessons from the class and demonstrate understanding in a game, then they will remember more of the lesson. Another benefit is that games give the trainees a chance to discuss the material with their peers. This is another valuable way to increase trainee retention. Get them talking about the topic and they will be learning more. Research has shown that the amount of class content retained after 60 days can increase from around 25% to around 70% when active participation is added to the class. Safety training is too important for only 25% of it to be remembered.

Why have fun? You might be thinking training is not supposed to be fun. Research has shown that when people have fun and laugh, they begin to relax. When they are relaxed, they are going to learn better. If someone is uncomfortable, either physically or mentally, they are not going to learn as well. When a brain is having fun through learning with others or through appropriate games, the brain will function more efficiently and more material will be remembered.

So, what kind of games should you play and how do you use them? Start off by remembering that the average adult is only going to be paying attention to spoken information for short periods of time. When you are designing your training class, try to

introduce an activity related to the class topic every 8 minutes. This activity can be a simple class discussion or could be more formal such as a class research project, physical activity, individual puzzle or group game. (These are just a few examples - there are many more to choose from).

For example, you can give your trainees an exercise that asks them to solve a problem or access information they just learned. Give them the opportunity to think, make connections and make meaning for themselves. It is very important with safety training that we help trainees learn to take the information that is presented to them and then have them customize it for their specific needs. For example, in a hazard communication training class, instead of just reviewing a sample MSDS, you could ask the trainees in small teams to 1) locate the MSDS for a product he or she actually uses and 2) ask them to determine which types of personal protective equipment are required when using that product and 3) ask where they would find that personal protective equipment. Strive for total learner involvement, i.e., having the trainee totally and actively involved with responsibility for his or her own learning.

While this is not a game, it is an activity that gets the trainee more involved and moving around. To turn this into a game, you could call it "MSDS Hunt" and put a time limit on it. You could also take one of key concepts of the class, and design a game around just that one part. In the hazard communication example, imagine that you want to focus on terminology used in a Material Safety Data Sheet. You could create a crossword puzzle, a BINGO game or even a card game using the words you want to help the class to remember. In all three examples, you shouldn't just tell the trainees a word they should know and then ask them to find it or fill it in. To make the game a learning tool, you could give them a clue and then once they solve it, they can look for the correct answer in the puzzle. (For some samples of games that work this way, and others you can use, visit [www.gamesforsafety.com](http://www.gamesforsafety.com)).

Now that you understand why you should make fun and games a part of your safety training classes, it is important to keep two points in mind. First, before you ask a class to participate in an activity, explain the game carefully and tell them why they are being asked to do it. Second, be certain to "debrief" the activity after it is over. This means that you must review the outcome of the activity with the class and ask specific questions to ensure they learned what you actually wanted them to learn. For example, in the "MSDS Hunt" used above, you would be careful to explain the activity and state any ground rules that you may need to put in place, such as which parts of the building trainees can travel to and what sources they can use to find the information. Be certain to state a specific amount of time for the activity. After the activity is over, it is very important that you debrief the trainees by discussing what went right and what went wrong during the activity, what the group learned, any new issues that may have been identified or any other areas they now know they need to learn more about. For example, during the "MSDS Hunt", a trainee could have learned that a particular MSDS was missing and you could continue the discussion by talking about what the alternative steps should be to find the sheet. The key is to remember that you should just not carry on with your class

without reviewing the activity first or it will not have the desired effect and will not be as meaningful.

Fun and games can help transform a dull boring training class into one that is memorable and more effective. These are a great way to introduce new information or change employee's behavior by helping trainees to relax, to want to participate (and learn at the same time) and retain more of what you want them to know.