Introduction
Colors and markings communicate important safety information to workers both on and off the job. Most people encounter and recognize some safety cues every day from colors and markings they see routinely (traffic signals). Unfortunately, we observe some colors or markings so often that they can just become part of the background clutter.

We need to periodically reinforce the meaning and importance of colors and markings and discuss how they can help protect people from harm. This safety talk’s purpose is to provide your employees with that information and stimulate discussion about the use of colors and markings at your facility.
Definitions

American National Standards Institute (ANSI)
• A private non-profit organization that oversees the development of voluntary consensus standards for products, services, processes, systems, and personnel in the U.S.

Emergency Response Guidebook (ERG)
• A guidebook for first responders during the initial phase of a dangerous goods/hazardous materials transportation incident. Identifies the specific or generic dangers of the hazardous material involved in the incident and next steps on how to protect themselves and the general public.

Discussion

Common safety colors
ANSI established rules defining how to use colors to communicate information. This standardization helps you easily recognize and understand what message a color is communicating. Examples are:

Red
• Fire protection equipment
• Danger, high risk of severe injury or death
• Emergency stops and alarms

Orange
• Hazard warnings
• Moderate risk of injury
• Guarding devices

Blue
• “Notice” or general information signs
• No immediate hazard

Green
• Safety equipment or information
• First aid, eyewash and emergency shower equipment

Yellow
• Caution statements
• Minor risk of injury
• Material-handling equipment
Vehicle or container placards
Trucks, railcars, and other containers must have placards attached in clear view to communicate content hazards. Some of the placards may also use symbols with the colors to convey the proper message. Refer to the Department of Transportation (DOT) Emergency Response Guidebook to discuss placards you may find at your facility or on vehicles delivering hazardous materials.

- Red: Combustible or flammable
- Yellow: Oxidizers
- White: Poison or toxic
- Orange: Explosives
- Green: Non-flammable gas
- Red and white stripe: Flammable solid

Special color and stripe combinations identify hazards such as corrosives, reactive materials, or biohazards. You may choose to show examples of these items if they are present at your facility.

Conclusion
Using colors for safety purposes in the workplace is a common practice for many companies. Safety standards identifying safety colors come from a variety of organizations including the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), ANSI, and others. Typically, colors are assigned meanings, which allow people to immediately determine what type of safety hazards are in the area, even if they are too far away to read any actual writing. Using colors in the workplace plays a crucial role in keeping your employees safe. Having a color system in place allows for employees to recognize hazards quicker and have a better understanding of the type of hazard they’re encountering.

Group Activity
There are several ways you can use colors and markings to communicate safety information. Ask participants to give examples and record responses to stimulate discussion. Possible ideas include:

- Color-coded paint on piping and equipment to identify contents or use.
- Striped or painted floors, roadways, or parking lots to mark personnel and vehicle-traffic pathways.
- Barricade tape to restrict entrance or divert traffic.
- Reflective markers to improve night-time visibility of hazards.
- Hazard information labels.
- Safety data sheet pictograms

Afterwards, ask them to observe how your facility uses color and report any changes or additions that may be needed to improve safety.

Resources
American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Z535
Department of Transportation (DOT) Emergency Response Guidebook
OSHA 29 CFR 1910.144 – Color Code for Marking Physical Hazards
National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)
National Electric Code (NEC)