

How's Your Company's Safety Program Working?

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Most of us in the safety profession are not doing this job for the money. We are in it to ensure that our fellow workers get home to their families each day in the same condition that they arrive to work. We assess workplaces, identify and examine every possible hazard, and abate these hazards to a safe level. We do all this and then we measure our effectiveness by comparing our incident and severity rates to averages within our industry, and to our historical data. Unfortunately, these rates only measure our failure rate. Unless we have zero for each rate, we failed to some degree. We can work toward and measure our successes rather than our failures and ultimately bring down our trailing indicators.

One of the most effective tools we can use is to regularly observe the worksite, in other words, perform safety audits. This not only allows the company to take a first hand look at employees demonstrating their ability, but also sends a message to the employee that the company cares about their safety. To effectively conduct a worksite observation, plan on being there for no less than 1 hour, and if more than one crew is present, 2-3 hours may be best. Divide your audit into categories such as: Work Procedures, Equipment/Facilities, Ergonomics and Personal Protective Equipment. Have a checklist for each category for things to look at, and then assign a severity scoring system to each area. It's best to avoid a 1-10 scale because it leaves too much to interpretation by the auditor. Put a scale of 1 for little or no risk, 3 for some risk and 10 for serious risk. Start the observation from away from the work. Take time to look at the job set-up and examine work in progress. Take digital photos throughout the process. These can be used at a later time for training.

Important note: Photos used against an employee for violations would be extremely detrimental to the program, so try to keep your pictures restricted to the good safety practices. Address unsafe acts or conditions immediately and verbally in a one-on-one format.

The next step while you observe on your way to the site is to chat with the personnel at the site. Ask them separately to provide details their tailboard discussion to determine if a thorough job briefing had indeed been done. This is one way for a company to ensure that a job briefing was done as required in OSHA 29 CFR 1910.269 (c). Once you have spent time, made notes and taken photos of the good stuff, it's time to write a report and score your audit. With this system, typically 90-100 is very good, 80-90 is good, 70-80 will need some work, 60-70 indicates a condition that should be addressed ASAP (hopefully already done in the field), and below 60 it's time for someone to go

home. A database can be developed to measure this simple matrix which can show continued improvement and also be used as part of an incentive program. This beats offering incentives for low incidence and severity rates (a prize for being less of a failure?).

A critical part of our safety program is the management support. This support has to be from the top down, but yet who do we reprimand when the system fails... the worker. There are two important parts that we need to look at. First, we need to train Team Leaders, Supervisors, Managers and Executives, then we need to hold them accountable for the injuries and accidents that occur to the people under their control. Team Leaders (those in charge in the field) have the direct contact with the employees in the field and should be able to identify at-risk conditions of the employee. If the employee had a tough night due to a personal event, the Team Leader should be aware that this may cause that person to be more at risk and assign them to a less hazardous task for the day, or in extreme cases, send him home. From a corporate point of view, to lose \$200 in productivity is much better than a \$30,000 injury or worse. The team leader should also perform weekly self-audits to ensure that everything is going well with their crew. Supervisors must know what is going on in the field and should visit on a regular basis to determine if the jobsite is free of hazards. Productivity will be at its highest when the site is safe. Managers and executives are responsible for ensuring that lower levels of supervision are done properly to ensure a safe and productive workforce. Measure the incident and severity rates for each of these levels of management to determine if your management team is doing their part. Get a commitment from upper management to tie incentives to low rates. Measure how many safety items or equipment issues were identified and rectified in a given period. Also measure the time taken to rectify unsafe conditions identified during a facility inspection. Measure the percentage of training and employee attendance for the training under each level of supervision.

Human resources have a role in safety as well. They can ensure that the people performing the work are capable and fit. This can be done by having a fitness test prior to hiring or transferring employees to new positions. Be sure to have the fitness test developed by a licensed therapist on-site to determine fitness requirements and integrate with state and/or federal ADA laws. Also, consider having a physical therapist on site on a regular basis to identify physical issues before they are impacted by the work. Measure the types of injuries as related to the condition of the employee for continued improvement.

With all these programs in place, employees may still sustain injuries. Why do they work unsafely and put themselves in the position of getting hurt? The reason we do what we do is because of the consequences that we perceive at the time. If I reach a little from this ladder, I can finish without having to go down and move the ladder, or... I am much more comfortable without my glasses on. So... said the frustrated safety pro, what do we do? We try to invoke other consequences that will over-ride these inherent thoughts. The most powerful consequence is related to those closest to the employee... their families, friends and hobbies. Put out information in whatever effective media available to tie family to safety. When you find an issue during an audit, discuss the

potential impact the injury would have on their family. A great tool is to utilize the National Safety Council's Family Safety & Health Magazine. For just a few dollars a year per employee, you can have the magazine sent directly to the employee's home. This positively impacts your company in several ways. It teaches about home and recreational safety with seasonal information, introduces children to look at recreational activities from a safety perspective, and gets the family to look at the employee's work in a different way, thus impacting the worker's safety practices by remembering that their child mentioned, "Mom/Dad make sure you work safely today". All of these things will affect the bottom line for a company, not just in work losses, but in overall health and insurance costs. For a small additional fee, the corporate logo can be placed on the cover of the magazine and you may even have a full page to outline the company safety practice or discuss particular hazards or recent incidences that now will provoke the spouse to discuss with the employee.

There are many of other innovative ways to positively impact a company's safety program and get employees home injury-free. This article outlines a few ideas that may help to measure your effectiveness. If you have other ideas, let us know, it will help all of us to be more effective safety pros.

To submit an article for an upcoming newsletter, email Lee or Michele.

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