

TECH Bulletin: Creating a Safety Culture



A member of the Frankennuth Financial Group

INCENTIVES: CREATING A SAFETY CULTURE

In a strong safety culture, everyone feels responsible for safety and pursues it on a regular basis. Employees identify and correct unsafe conditions and behaviors. Workers feel comfortable reminding the plant manager to wear safety glasses. Co-workers look out for one another and point out unsafe behaviors. Safety takes precedence over short-term production pressures. The organization values and rewards such actions. How can a safety and health program achieve these results?

Many companies start increasing safety awareness using posters and warning signs. However, posters do not increase employee involvement. Companies may also develop safety recognition programs, create safety committees and start incentive programs. Most incentive programs provide rewards for a certain number of days without an injury, and re-start the day count after each injury.

MOTIVATING EMPLOYEES TO THINK ABOUT SAFETY

- *Use accountability systems* to establish safety goals, measure safety activities and charge costs back to the units that incur them. Make safety everyone's responsibility. Shift focus from eliminating hazards to eliminating unsafe behaviors.

- *Define roles and responsibilities for safety and health.* Spell out how the organization will deal with competing priorities, such as production versus safety. To help bring managers on board, show that reduced accident costs will more than pay for needed changes. A safety incentive program may suffer if workers receive stronger encouragement to maximize production.

- *Use a kick-off celebration to increase involvement.* Inform employees what the program will accomplish and how they will benefit. People need to understand why changes should be made. If employees hear that a program is being implemented but have not been informed, they tend to resist and opt out.

- *Provide training* to management, safety and health committee members and a number of employees to create a core group. These key members should assist in keeping safety at the forefront of employees' minds.

- *Hold people accountable* for their areas of responsibility and provide recognition, rewards and incentives for positive results to encourage participation. Incentive programs should encourage employees to use proper safety precautions, even when this slows down their work schedule. Employees may not bother putting on safety glasses when they will "only be grinding for few minutes".

- *Develop a measurement and feedback system.* Examples for measuring progress include the number of hazards reported or corrected, the number of inspections completed, and the number of equipment checks performed.

- *Continually measure performance, communicate results and celebrate successes.* This may involve holding safety meetings, putting up a bulletin board and installing a comment box. Use reinforcement, feedback and ongoing training to sustain continuous improvement.

- *Encourage proper reporting of injuries and illnesses.* If employees receive rewards for low injury rates, they may avoid reporting injuries. Even simple injuries, such as slivers, can become infected and result in serious conditions if not treated. Employees should not be afraid to report injuries to avoid "re-starting" the day count for incentive rewards.

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CASE STUDY: USING EYE PROTECTION

A chemical company reported an employee's eye injury on its 300 log and listed the cause as employee failure to wear eye protection. An OSHA interview found that the manager was reluctant to discipline the employee, who was an excellent worker. Typical of most companies, the accident report appears to blame the victim.

Employee interviews found that 75 percent of employees did not wear goggles because they forgot them in their lockers, 10 percent of employees felt that the goggles did not fit properly, and 15 percent experienced goggle fogging. To address these issues, the company could purchase retainer clips that attached the goggles to hard hats and change the style of goggles to eliminate the fogging problem.

When management shows commitment to preventing injuries, employee participation increases, resulting in increased employee morale and a feeling of being part of a team. When investigating accidents, place emphasis on improving employee safety. Make sure employees know that the purpose is to prevent future injuries, not place blame.

TIPS FOR CREATING SAFETY INCENTIVES

Most safety incentives focus on the number of injuries, but the incentive program should also encourage employees to follow safety procedures. Employees who recognize and eliminate unsafe behavior and unsafe conditions will eventually "police" one another to use proper procedures. The following tips encourage safety behavior and rewards employees for good safety habits.

- *Use smaller incentives and award them more often.* This keeps program costs and provides continual feedback. Employee participation increases with reasonable, obtainable rewards. Ask employees what they want and provide incentives that appeal to them.

- *Limit the definition of "injury"* to something requiring medical attention or time lost from work. Avoid re-starting the day count for every bruise or scrape. Remind employees to report all injuries, and let the safety director determine the need for medical treatment. Otherwise, employees may not report injuries for fear of re-starting the day count.

- *Make safety a priority that pays.* For example, add workers' compensation savings to quarterly or annual production bonuses and subtract costs for medical treatment. This allows employees to directly affect their bonuses and teaches them that safety pays.

Remember that if employees report accidents and near misses, but do not see action, such as retraining or purchasing new equipment, they may feel discouraged. Encourage employees with regular incentives, and they will take care of each other.