Tips for Improving Workplace Safety and Health

The best safety and health programs involve every level of an organization. Here are strategies that you can institute in your company to raise awareness, change attitudes and improve workplace safety and health.

1. Start at the top. Managers must take the lead in their company's workplace safety. Start by developing a clear, concise policy that explains to employees how safety and health relate to your organization's core values. Standardize your policy across your organization. Communicate your policy to all supervisors and employees. Make workplace safety and health the first topic at company meetings.

2. Involve employees. Employees know their jobs best, so involve them in every aspect of your company's safety and health management system. Include employees in plans for new equipment and process changes. Train them to participate in audits and safety investigations. Involve them in defining safe work practices. Encourage employees to report hazards and to take corrective actions. Spotlight good efforts by employees to set an example and motivate others. Recognize and praise employee initiative to improve performance.

3. Set goals. Once a company's workplace safety and health policy is developed, make it happen. Management and employees should work together to set clear, obtainable and measurable goals and then build objectives that will achieve results.

4. Walk the talk. Support from the top is crucial to demonstrate commitment. Make sure that top-level management is visible by taking an active part in your safety and health program. Participate in training events, safety meetings and workshops. Conduct periodic walk-throughs. Stay informed about all incidents, including near-misses, and take action to prevent repeats. Supervisors should lead by example by wearing personal protective equipment and following company procedures.

5. Involve your entire company team. The team creating or updating your company's safety and health management system should include representatives from all parts of your operation, including human resources, contracting, procurement and labor relations. Enlist their help to institute policies, set up employee training, and communicate information throughout your company.

6. Provide resources, grant authority. Provide employees with support and authority to get their work done safely. Ensure that your budgeting process addresses safety and health needs. Bring in safety and health experts when needed. Use all resources at hand, including free tools and information from OSHA.

7. Make everyone accountable. Measure what is important. Hold managers and employees accountable for their own safety and the safety of others. Incorporate safety and health targets into performance standards for both supervisors and employees.

8. Keep accurate records. Keep accurate safety and health records of injuries and illnesses. Look at these regularly to spot where problems may be arising. Require supervisors to deliver reports on safety and health performance and progress at company meetings.

9. Engage contractors and subcontractors, too. Contractors and subcontractors are part of your team. Establish criteria for selecting responsible contractors and subcontractors. Example: Injury and Illness rates must be below the industry average. Clearly communicate your expectations that contractors and subcontractors work safely and follow the rules. Create and communicate clear policies to reward safe work and penalize unsafe work practices. Periodically review contractor and subcontractor performance, take steps to ensure that problems are corrected, and require ongoing improvement.

10. Strive for continual improvement. To remain effective, evaluate your company's safety and health management system at least annually. Create an

action plan to continually improve. Track your results. Celebrate and reward your successes.

11. Explore OSHA's resources. OSHA's web site at www.osha.gov offers free fact sheets, guidance documents, pocket guides, posters, and hundreds of pages of information that show you how to maintain safe and healthful workplaces. Download or order our popular English/Spanish QuickCards®, sign up to receive our twice-monthly QuickTakes e-newsletter, explore our free online training materials, and learn about OSHA's compliance assistance resources, outreach information, and opportunities to work with OSHA through our cooperative programs. OSHA's web site also provides links to your local OSHA area office or State Plan office.

Be sure to visit these sites, too:
- Safety & Health Management System e-tool: www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/safetyhealth
- Making the Business Case for Safety and Health: www.osha.gov/dcsp/products/topics/businesscase

12. Contact OSHA. Call your local OSHA area or State Plan office today to learn how protecting your employees can improve productivity, lower costs and improve your company's bottom line. Ask about OSHA's compliance assistance tools, education opportunities and cooperative programs. Request a free safety and health evaluation of your company to learn how to recognize potential hazards at your worksites, improve your occupational safety and health management systems, and even qualify for a one-year exemption from routine OSHA inspections. Consultation services are separate from enforcement and do not result in penalties or citations. For more than three decades, this program has delivered free assistance to half a million employers. Visit www.osha.gov/consultation.

Why You Should Care About WORKPLACE SAFETY
Keeping employees safe is not only every employer's legal responsibility – it also makes good business sense. Addressing safety and health issues in the workplace saves money and adds value to your business. Recent estimates of business costs associated with occupational injuries total $170 billion per year – expenditures that come straight out of your company's profits. Simply put, protecting people on the job is in everyone's best interest: our economy, our community, our coworkers and our families.

When employees are protected from hazards, the direct cost savings to businesses include:
- Health care costs
- Workers' compensation insurance costs
- Expenditures for return-to-work programs
- Costs for injured employee accommodations
- Retraining employees and temporary workers

A workplace safety and health management system also presents indirect benefits:
- Increased productivity
- Higher quality products
- Increased employee morale
- Better labor-management relations
- Reduced turnover

Employees and their families benefit from workplace safety and health management systems because:
- Family incomes are protected
- Family lives are not upset by a work-related illness, injury or fatality
- Families are spared needless stress

Help for Small Businesses
OSHA has many free resources specially designed to help small businesses develop safety and health programs:
- www.osha.gov/smallbusiness
- www.osha.gov/consultation

For more complete information:

OSHA Occupational Safety and Health Administration

U.S. Department of Labor
www.osha.gov
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