

Case Study # 3

Small Seal Company

This small business case study company manufactures weather-stripping, bulb, and brush seals using patented technology. Much of their operation is housed in a fairly large and new facility that is in good condition. Areas of the plant include office space, weather-stripping fabrication area with a mezzanine for reel construction, a plastic extrusion area, additional brush fabrication area, warehousing space, and an upper floor that is currently used as additional storage space. This company employs more than 200 full time and no part time employees. The fabrication areas are clean, well lit, and well organized.

Grant Work:

After an initial gap analysis, walkthrough and a meeting with the plant supervision, the RIT assistants concluded that the plant was in relatively good standing concerning safety and health. The management for the most part was very accepting of advancing their safety and health programs; they still held old way of thinking somewhat on to the “it hasn’t happened yet so we don’t worry about it” attitude.

The company has employee manuals and SOP’s mention in detail safety and health guidelines. The company has a system for incident investigation and reporting as well as having done weekly health and safety inspection. The company has an extensive ergonomics program which has virtually eliminated all ergonomic related injuries in the past few years. All the pieces for an excellent health and safety system are available spread across the company. RIT suggested that the company simply combine all of its safety and health policies and procedures into one place creating a more streamlined process. The company was resistant to combining all of its safety and health documentation into one location citing that it would be more complicated to find the information needed.

Much of the machinery in the company is custom made machinery, which is made mostly in-house, it often takes several weeks to create or repair each machine. For this reason the issue of is guarding on these machines current with federal and state regulations regarding production use and prototype that is considered temporary.

As a result of the custom machinery PPE is often overused to replace engineering or administrative controls. Several guarding issues were present including a major nip/entanglement hazards on a yarn spooling machine which was repeated on approximately 20 machines. In the plastic extrusion area parts of the machinery reaches temperature in excess of 400 degrees Fahrenheit which are adjacent to a major walkway, with only a small sign to warn employees of the impending danger. The RIT assistants worked with the company to develop guarding systems and installation methods for all of the guarding hazards, as well as clarify the requirements on guarding of temporary and prototype equipment.

The process used to make weather stripping included several flammable substances, as well as various flammables used in malignances of the facility and machinery. The company's flammable stored area in the warehouse consisted of 1/2 inch plywood cabinet with no backing and plywood doors without a lock on it. The cabinet did not even come close to meeting the requirements of a flammable storage cabinet. Inside of the cabinet the amount of chemicals exceeded the maximum amount allowed by OSHA for that class of chemicals. For chemicals not stored in the cabinet mostly the 55 gallon drums, they were stored across the aisle way in which fork trucks traveled, under a rack system. Not only were these chemicals not stored inside a cabinet, they also were breaking a minimum distance in which 2 piles of flammable storage can occur. The RIT assistants gathered for the company all the information about flammable storage and explained what each of the requirements are, including distances between piles, amounts allowed in a pile dependent on what class of chemicals present, and the specifications on flammable storage cabinets including materials construction methods, along with possible products the company could purchase.

At the company's request, information was provided on a variety of small topics and emergency eyewash's, including locations, clear distances, and maintenance and OSHA standards.

Follow up:

This company was different from the other participants; they had in place a fairly good safety system in place. This company did have to overcome a difficult mindset --that if it hasn't happened yet and it's been done for years, it's not going to happen so don't worry about it.

The follow up gap analysis showed several changes in the attitude of the company, they say they are making people more aware and placing a greater focus on taking care of issues faster. This is different from the impressions that were received during the initial visits. There were several safety issues that were brought up to the management of the company as rather large problems, according to the gap analysis, the company has completed one of them, and has yet to address the last two.

There has been a change in the methods of training the employees, the company has moved onto a more multimedia presentation, using interactive cd-roms to train employees.

This company showed a very important lesson, a company can only grow in its safety practices with the right attitude, which can be a major problem among small businesses.