

Fostering Involvement in a Safety and Health Management System

Getting employees involved in a safety management system may not be the easiest thing to accomplish at some companies. Here are some ideas that may get you started....

Educate, Educate, Educate

Do your employees even know that you *have* a safety management system? They should. They should know what the policy statement is, where to find a copy, and what it means to both the company and to them as employees.

They should also know that the company has reviewed the applicable regulations, and that employee safety training and education is one of the primary responsibilities for the company. A general safety awareness training and education program is a good place to start. Specific regulatory training that applies to the company, to employee groups or to individual employees should then be implemented. In many cases retraining is required on an annual basis.

Create a safety committee

Safety committees can be set up fairly easily. They work best if they are employee led, rather than being led by management or supervision. In this way, employees feel more empowered. Make sure you have a charter or other guidance for the committee that includes the creation of suggestions or ideas to solve a problem, not just bringing the problems to the table.

Train the committee members in accident investigation techniques, ergonomics, and inspections, and have them perform a walk-around inspection of the facility. Involve them in incident investigations if there is an injury at the site. Have them perform basic ergonomic evaluations of work-stations, computers or assembly activities.

To start, ask employees who would like to volunteer for the committee, and supply coffee or cold drinks for the meetings. Once the committee is functional, rotate the committee membership and try to recruit people who would not normally volunteer, but are those most in harm's way or those that are the informal leaders of the workers. Keep the committee to 6-8 people, and have each area represented, so that meetings are manageable.

Have "Safety Talks"

Implement a safety awareness campaign that focuses on a specific topic each quarter or each month. Use the resources of a safety committee, or group meetings to launch a 10 or 15 minute discussion on the topic of the month and how it affects the employees in the meeting. Show a video or use a handout to emphasize the important topic points.

Involve families

Have the employees' families create a safety poster or picture – give them a topic and hold a contest each quarter. Give out 4 movie tickets as a prize, or a family-classic video with a few packages of microwave popcorn.

Hold a safety fair. Get local community resources together and bring them together in one place. Fire, police, health-care agencies can easily be involved. And many times you can get help through your insurance carrier for little or no cost.

ABC's

Awareness drives Behavior which drives Culture changes. The ultimate goal is to change a safety culture so that safety is integrated into every aspect of the workplace. Employees should automatically consider safety of the task as easily as they do the steps to accomplish that task.

Before you can have a culture change, however, employee behaviors must change. Safety may not be automatic, but it should be considered as part of the overall process, and a singular item in a procedure or process. Do employees use the correct equipment? Are they properly trained?

In order to effect behavior changes, employees must first be aware of safety initiatives in the workplace. Do they know about the safety management system? Do they know that this quarter, the company is focusing on hand safety, or back safety, or housekeeping (or whatever the topic is)? How is information communicated to employees?

Safety Ideas or Suggestions

Create a suggestion box. Empower the safety committee to check it before their meetings and discuss the items in it. Employees, when they think about it, know where the unsafe conditions and hazards are in the company, and may not be willing to bring them forward. A suggestion box provides them with a discreet method for putting forth issues or concerns.

Contests & Rewards

The prevailing advice here is to *be careful* of what the contest is for. Many companies may create a contest to see what department can go without an injury the longest. Although elimination and reduction in injuries is a good goal, it is not a good contest, as it may **DIS**-courage employees from reporting injuries and incidents. If you must create a contest around incidents, a better goal would be to focus on *lost-time* incidents, so that employees are still encouraged to report injuries and unsafe conditions.

Rewards can also be given out by the safety committee to highlight who has helped the safety cause the most in the last month or quarter. Sometimes the best rewards cost very little. Some of the most popular are special parking spaces for safe employees, coffee delivered by the supervisor, etc. Make it simple and easy to manage.

Management Walk-Around

Management must be visible. They need to get out of their office, walk around, talk to employees and ask them about their safety needs. If management is not behind the management system program, the program is destined to fail. And, employees need to see this support, not just by financial resources allocation, but visibly and physically.