

MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

Often a company will want to evaluate how well their safety management system is performing. They need to discern if the management system is improving the safety culture of the company. In order to evaluate if the safety performance is improving, a company needs some measured data to analyze. On a very frequent basis, it is imperative that measurement and evaluation take place in any management system. Such evaluation, in a safety and health management system, will often take the form of trend analysis from either incident data or audit findings.

INCIDENT TREND ANALYSIS

Once a company performs audits, or collects all their incident data, there may be identifiable trends that appear within the data. Such trends are indicative of potential problems that should be addressed. Often the trends indicate that the same or similar problems exist in more than one area of the company. For example, if there are a number of hand lacerations throughout different areas of the business, it may indicate that a program should be targeted for hand protection and wearing gloves on the job. If there are several slips and falls, in several areas of the company, it may indicate a need to address better housekeeping practices. Or, if those slips and falls are all during winter, perhaps the focus needs to be on anti-slip surfaces in the entrances and stairwells.

Trend analysis of incidents may indicate general needs for the company in the overall safety program. However, trends can also develop in just one area of the company. For example, if the machine shop is consistently experiencing incidents where employees are receiving small lacerations on various parts of the body, perhaps shielding and guards need to be installed to protect employees from flying debris. Or if a loading dock area is frequently the site of incidents, perhaps a fork-lift or power industrial truck program needs to be implemented to address the safe use of this equipment.

AUDIT DATA ANALYSIS

Incident data is not the only data source available. Small businesses may not experience enough incidents to analyze any trends. Audit data could also be used to evaluate the safety of a work place, or safety performance of a company. As various types of audits are performed, either via checklists, questionnaires, or more formal audit processes, data is collected from each of these sources. This data can then be compiled and potential problems addressed. Again, these problems could be restricted to one area, or be more general in nature. As an example scenario: a walk-through audit was performed with a checklist a few months ago, and findings were made that a circular saw was missing its guard. The problem was immediately addressed and the guard replaced. At the next walk-through audit, the same saw was found again without its guard. This is a trend that needs to be addressed. The question of why the guard was removed then needs to be asked. The answer could be as simple as the guard keeps coming loose and becomes wobbly, and is therefore more of a hazard than not having the guard in place at all, or perhaps that the task performed really should use a different type of saw that is not available, and the circular saw without the guard in place can substitute. With the safety issue of using a circular saw without a guard, and the inherent dangers of this type of use,

either the guard needs to be fixed so it doesn't wobble, or a different saw needs to be purchased.

HOUSEKEEPING AND QUALITY

Housekeeping is another indicator of safety trends and performance. An unkempt workplace has more incidents than a neat and clean workplace. If the workplace is dirty or messy, employees are more likely to be inattentive or careless in their tasks. This affects not only the incident rates and trends, but also reflects in the quality of the products and services provided by the company. In relation to this, poor quality can therefore be a potential indicator of a poor safety culture or performance.

SUMMARY

Evaluating the workplace through several data sources is the best way to evaluate the safety performance of a company. Using incident data, inspections, audits and a "general knowledge" of the work site, as well as any other measurements, can assist in finding trends and solving problems. Improving safety at any workplace improves quality and enhances employee effectiveness. Measuring and evaluating data sources is one avenue of driving the continuous improvement in a safety management system.