

## How Successful is Your Safety and Health Program?

Dave Parsons

Safety and Loss Control Consultant

There are four key issues facing companies today: competition, quality, productivity, and costs. In the past, companies faced competition from other local organizations trying to compete for a small number of customers in a limited geographic area; now they are competing with companies locally, nationally, and even overseas.

Quality has been the clarion call for companies for more than a decade. Those that were able to adapt their products and services to the public's demand for better quality are surviving tough economic times. Companies that have allowed quality to slide, often by refusing to let the customer define it, have paid the price.

Organizations are under extreme pressure to produce more products and offer more services in a shorter amount of time. In a competitive global environment, meeting customers' needs quickly can often determine a company's market share and profitability.

The push for lower costs has led many companies to reduce the size of their workforce. Often employees who remain must do the same amount of work with smaller budgets. The temptation to cut back in critical areas is strong, but safety cannot be allowed to become a victim of short-term thinking. Successful companies know that like quality, safety doesn't cost...it pays.

Safety pays in two ways. First, eliminating preventable causes of injuries and illnesses can result in fewer disabling injuries, lower workers' compensation costs, and lower replacement costs. Second, by eliminating or controlling exposure to hazards through an aggressive safety and health program, senior managers spend less time managing safety and health issues and can focus on all parts of operations, including quality, productivity, and competitiveness.

What makes a workplace safety and health program successful? It achieves and maintains safe, healthful workplaces. The key words are achieve and maintain. To achieve something you must make it a goal and work to accomplish it. Then, once you have accomplished the goal, you must work to maintain it.

There are eight key elements to achieve a successful safety and health program: management commitment; accountability; employee involvement; hazard recognition and control; workplace design and engineering; accident/near miss investigation; training and orientation; and assessment, audits and evaluations.

Let's define each of these key elements.

**Management Commitment:** Make a management commitment and gain management's involvement. Without active involvement, mid-level managers and front-line supervisors tend to ignore safety and health as an issue. Communicate a vision.

**Accountability:** Accountability links responsibilities to consequences. Company owners and managers are responsible for making the business a successful one. Accountability also helps your employees understand that you're committed to achieving and maintaining a safe and healthful workplace.

**Employee Involvement:** Designs and engineering controls are limited in their ability to reduce hazards. Companies now understand that their real assets are employees, not machinery, and they also realize that employees must recognize their stake in a safe and healthful workplace. As employees become more involved in planning, implementation, and improvement, they see the need for safer work practices.

One of the best ways to involve employees is through a safety committee, which is a group of employees representing both labor and management.

**Hazard Recognition and Control:** Establishing and maintaining safe and healthful conditions require identifying hazards, evaluating their potential effects, developing ways to eliminate or control them, and planning action priorities. This process is the essence of successful safety and health management.

**Workplace Design and Engineering:** Organizations must incorporate safety into workplace design, production processes, and equipment selection. They also need to evaluate and modify or replace existing processes, equipment, and facilities to make them safer.

**Accident/Near Miss Investigation:** Despite your best efforts, you may not be able to prevent all accidents. Investigations are conducted to learn the causes of injuries, illnesses, and incidents so they can be corrected or removed, and provide an opportunity to learn and to improve the company's safety and health program.

**Training and Orientation:** New and transferred employees must become familiar with company policies and procedures, and learn how to perform their job safely and efficiently. The use of on-the-job classroom and specialty training can contribute to a successful safety and health program.

**Assessment, Audits, and Evaluations:** Every organization needs tools to measure conditions, monitor compliance, and assess progress. Your safety and health program, along with accidents and near misses, should be reviewed once a year, and should include self-assessments, third-party assessments, and voluntary regulatory assessments.

If you have any questions or would like assistance with your safety and health program, contact your AGC safety and loss control consultant, insurance company, or safety and loss control consultant, insurance company, or OR-OSHA consultative services.