

# Assessing Your Company's Safety Strategies

## Why it may be time for a workplace safety committee check-up

By Bob Dietzel

Many employers in the construction industry have workplace safety committees, in which representatives from various departments meet monthly to discuss safety issues, hazards and best practices. The purpose of



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these monthly meetings is to promote a culture of safety and ultimately reduce the frequency and severity of jobsite injuries.

In addition

to supporting your company's safety and health, workplace safety committees can also support your company's financial wellbeing. Pennsylvania Workers Compensation law, for example, provides a 5% policy discount for employers maintaining certified safety committees.

However, here is the confusing part – a recent study of policy holders between 1994-2016 suggests having a safety committee does not necessarily correlate with a healthy workers compensation program:

- Although the number of participating risks increases each year, only 2.6% of eligible risks participated in the program in 2016.
- **Participating** risks have **higher total claim frequency** than non-participating risks, every year.
- Participating risks had better loss ratios than non-participating risks in only ten of the past twenty-two years and in only two of the past ten years. In other words, companies **without** certified safety committees had **better** loss ratios.

What are we to make of this contradictory information?

While this data does seem to be counter-intuitive, it supports the concept that employers will only benefit from their workplace safety

committees as much as they invest in them. Like a tool left sitting on a workbench, a workplace safety committee will be ineffective if it isn't properly employed. Top-down leadership support and customized, relevant content is critical.

Although responsibility for managing the workplace safety plan should be assigned to the safety committee, experience tells us without consistent senior executive attention and prioritization, safety processes fail almost 100% of the time.

Conversely, the chance of improving your organization's safety process and outcomes increases exponentially with clearly visible, enthusiastically articulated senior management support. There is no substitute for demonstrating there is commitment to a safe work environment at the "C" level.

### Training and Implementation

Training employees to become aware of and to adhere to loss control guidelines is a critical element of your Workplace Safety Plan. It is only through rigorous training, follow up and encouragement you can ensure your employees will keep safety top-of-mind throughout the workday no matter the situation, no matter the stress of operations.

The Workplace Safety Plan will fail without consistent, effective employee training. Training should clearly identify the full set of workplace hazards for employees at all levels through words and visuals. Training should also be refreshed at regular intervals. Those employees who are most vulnerable to accidents can typically be found at your organization's fringes; the employee who is new to the job and the long tenured company veteran. Without training, the first group won't know while the second group thinks it knows it all.

Consider enlisting assistance from individuals and/or organizations

specializing in employee training. Commanding attention, building interest, conveying a comprehensive narrative and affecting meaningful, lasting change among your employees will require expertise. This expertise may exceed the abilities of in-house staff, even though the price tag attached to in-house staff may be attractive. Professionals who possess this expertise can be found through internet searches, LinkedIn, word of mouth and professional organizations.

Of course, interview candidates to make sure they mesh with your corporate culture and are prepared to achieve your goals. This is your workplace safety committee. They are there only to make it more effective.

### Communications

Effective communications are an essential element in establishing a comprehensive safety system.

By posting reminders and warnings about safety throughout the jobsite, you will further emphasize to employees the importance of following the company safety plan. Communications outreach should be consistent, frank, transparent and create meaningful dialogue on issues identified for resolution. Employees can recognize a "puff piece" from a mile away. It drains credibility and energy from the team, while jeopardizing what had been otherwise earnest intentions.

A good story untold changes neither hearts nor minds.

As in all things, management must lead through action. Words will fall short if employees witness management or key employees taking short cuts or even completely ignoring the company workplace safety plan. All good words and effort will go to waste, while compromising job site safety.

### Recordkeeping

What can be more boring than

recordkeeping? At the same time, what can be more important when documenting the past to work towards a better future? Accurate and detailed recordkeeping is more than a vital, essential element of every workplace safety program. It is also a necessary requirement towards satisfying OSHA and additional regulatory requirements. Recordkeeping creates accountability and effective business management, while memorializing results for safety inspections and insurance audits.

Assign this important activity to personnel you feel confident will be working at your construction company for the long haul. Obviously, this person should be organized and skilled at differentiating between useful and unnecessary information. When too much is said, nothing will be heard. Recordkeepers should also be skilled communicators. Otherwise, their records may be difficult to read and thus deprive management of important information.

### Evaluating the effectiveness of your workplace safety committee can be even more important than having one.

Enlist the aid and guidance of your trusted insurance agent or broker regarding your Workplace Safety Plan. Their knowledge, experience and expertise will help to ensure this important activity's success.

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