

# How To Run A Successful Safety Program

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An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

The safety director used that cliché countless times in workshops. It now sounded like the smartest advice in the world as he read about the accident at his competitor's manufacturing plant.

It was hard to believe that competitor would have to spend at least \$10 million to sort out a problem that probably could have been avoided for a percentage of that amount.

The safety director wasn't gloating. Change the names and details, and he could very well have been reading about his own company. A downsized workforce cutting corners, a growing number of minor accidents - all were issues his own plant had experienced in the past six months, and all were indications of a serious problem with the safety culture. If his story was going to have a different ending, he knew it was time to make some changes.

Accidents happen. But they shouldn't happen on the job. Such mistakes not only cost your business money but also can cost lives. The proper use of safety incentive programs can reduce or eliminate the circumstances that cause such mishaps.

A well-organized program rewards employees for proactive behavior and places an emphasis on preventive safety. This in turn leads to a decrease in accidents and lost-time injuries. Long-term change comes from improving processes as well as attitudes about safety. An incentive program can help develop an enduring safety culture within the company. Ultimately, emphasizing workplace safety is an emphasis on quality of life.

Safety programs can also save money, thereby improving a company's bottom line. Consider that an organization with \$100,000 of costs related to workplace injuries will have to produce an additional \$2 million in revenue just to cover this expense, assuming a 5% profit margin.

But by implementing safety incentive programs, a company can reduce accidents, which will result in a reduction of workers' compensation premiums, legal suits, equipment damage and repair, medical fees, insurance and administrative expenses. Plus, you don't lose experienced employees to lost-time injuries, so there's no need to train temporary workers.

Effective safety incentive programs require careful planning. This step-by-step booklet outlines principles and methods for running a successful safety program. You'll learn techniques to determine safety goals, design a comprehensive plan, create a budget, promote your incentive and evaluate your program's effectiveness.

## DEFINE GOALS

Start by making a list of your major safety concerns. Ask for assistance from foremen, supervisors, department heads, anyone who is well-informed regarding safety issues in their area. If possible, speak to some of the workers. Frequently a brief, anonymous survey of the rank-and-file will provide better input for your program than meetings with management would.

Check the previous year's accident and injury reports, too. These will provide a clear picture of the work environment, specifically where and how accidents most frequently occur.

As a final step, conduct a personal inspection of the entire workplace. Here is where you will notice the hazards possibly overlooked by people who work in those areas every day.

Once you've targeted your safety goals, craft your program objectives. Remember, everything must reinforce the types of behavior you want to change or improve.

Your goals should always be:

### **Simple and Specific**

Focus on one or two objectives and communicate those goals. Detail the desired activity, the units that will be measured, the expected performance level and behavioral change, as well as the time allotted to achieve these goals. Clarify why these objectives are important to the company overall.

### **Realistic**

Objectives must be attainable or participants will become discouraged. Go for a continuous improvement approach, not overnight miracles. Also, unrealistic goals may create a sense of distrust between labor and management. They will be seen as an example of how out of touch management is with its workers.

### **Well-timed**

Objectives should correspond with peak injury periods. Holding a program after the peak rush will not be as effective, nor will it be an accurate reflection of how to improve safety when it counts most.

### **Measurable**

You have to be able to quantify actions, or participants won't know what you expect. Also, base the guidelines on behavior the employees can control. It's common to use days as a measurement, but this may not work best for your workforce. For instance, a freight company chose to measure its safety stats in hours and miles because its drivers found these quantities more representative of their work.

### **Acceptable**

Everyone from top management to participants must support the goals. Also, workers must be assured managers will not discipline or fire them for reporting unsafe conditions, or for slowing down production. Employees need to know they will be seen as the person who helped stop an accident, not as a whistle blower.

## **FACTS AND FIGURES**

- The average workplace injury can cost a company \$28,000 in wage and productivity losses, medical expenses, administrative fees, etc.
- In 2001, workplace injuries tallied approximately \$40 billion in direct costs. However, indirect expenses totaled an additional \$80 billion to \$200 billion.
- In 2000, there were 5,915 workplace fatalities in the United States. That's about 3.8 deaths per 100,000 workers. Transportation incidents, contact with objects or equipment, and falls were the most common causes.
- Approximately 3.9 million people suffered disabling injuries in the workplace in 2000.
- The average cost of a workers' comp claim has more than tripled over the past 10 years.
- Generally 60 - 65% of all injury costs represent indemnity to employees for work time lost, not medical bills.

(Sources: U.S. Department of Labor-Bureau of Labor Statistics and National Safety Council)

## DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM

Once the program's objectives are defined, decide when and how long the campaign will run. Most safety programs last anywhere from three to six months, which allows time for education and training sessions and significant results. Take into account the complexity of your work environment and how many behaviors you want to change.

Safety programs usually emphasize lost-time accidents. This design is the most tangible and easily understood by employees.

However, there are problems with this approach. For instance, if management bases safety awards solely on accident rates, employees may hesitate to report injuries. Also, if a department or work group has an accident two days shy of the six-month goal, they are going to feel all the hard work of the previous months was a waste.

The best approach is to make accident-free days part of the program, as opposed to the entire focus. For example, employees can be rewarded for reporting potential safety hazards, demonstrating their knowledge and training co-workers.

A growing number of companies focus on lost-time injuries. As long as a worker is not taken off the job for any significant length of time, these accidents don't count against the record. This approach encourages employees to report minor injuries or incidents before they become serious.

One option is to offer safety levels based on a point system. Workers earn points for accident-free days, as well as other safety achievements. At each level the participants receive an award. If a lost-time incident occurs, instead of going back to zero, the group returns to the beginning of that level, or is penalized a certain number of points. The organization would still track accident-free days, but it wouldn't be the only guideline for success.

Also decide whether participants will work as individuals or on teams. Most experts suggest a combo approach. Teamwork is necessary for long-term change and a true safety culture. However, innovation usually come from individual efforts.

Keep these issues in mind:

- Each worker must believe he or she can attain the goal and that rewards will appeal to each individual on the team.
- Everyone must have the chance to be recognized for outstanding individual achievement, even if the team doesn't meet its objectives.
- Teams should consist of no more than six to eight members to keep the group cohesive and focused.
- Teams should be comprised of both supervisors and workers who perform similar tasks and encounter the same hazards.
- Don't pit teams against each other. They should compete against themselves. For example, base each group's goals on its previous year's performance. Workers will be focused on improving themselves and their team rather than competing against other groups.

## **BUILD THE BUDGET**

Break down the finances for a safety program into three major cost categories: administration, promotion and awards. The following factors should also be considered when determining the budget:

- Number and type of objectives
- Number and demographics of participants
- Length of the program
- Time and cost of training
- Cost of program administration, including promotion

Keep in mind a high rate of employee turnover magnifies costs. Turnover increases the risk of accidents. Plus new employees must be trained. Incentive experts recommend spending on your program a maximum of 50% of the anticipated savings you expect to realize.

This is generally computed by multiplying the cost-per-accident amount by the anticipated percent of incident reduction. The final figure will represent your working budget.

As a rule of thumb, awards should claim 60% - 70% of the total budget. Training should account for 10 - 15% of the budget, depending on the amount and complexity of the safety goals.

If you really want to change behavior, don't skimp on training and follow-up efforts.

Budget the remaining 10 - 15% for promotion and program administration.

Program administration costs fall under the safety department budget, unless an incentive firm is handling the project.

Administration includes enrollment and database maintenance, points and award tracking, updating and mailing of performance standings reports, preparing management reports, collecting data for 1099 and/or W-2 forms for winners and conducting a post-program evaluation.

## **PROMOTE THE SAFETY CAMPAIGN**

While safety awareness seems a simple enough concept after all, every worker can relate to workplace hazards-achieving it is no small feat. Employees deal with a multitude of distractions: production quotas, disputes with co-workers, takeover rumors, family issues, financial concerns, etc.

A strong promotional element to your incentive program will help get their attention. You have to get the word out and keep it going, so make communications a top priority.

The first part of the promotion will advertise the rules. The kickoff meeting and initial efforts should answer these questions:

- What are the program's goals?
- When will the program run?
- Who is eligible to participate?
- How will workers earn awards?

A true safety culture requires discipline and the constant repetition of program objectives. Not necessarily fun concepts. Also, most people think that accidents happen to someone else, so it becomes tempting for them to tune out the program. The promotional incentive campaign must break through the routine of the normal work day.

Try to communicate with your target audience in some way every two to three weeks. These regular meetings will become the backdrop for a successful program. They are the most direct opportunity for immediate supervisors to reinforce the primary objectives of the program. Also, participants should receive a progress report, both for the group and individuals. Here are a few ideas for keeping the program fresh for participants:

- A computer manufacturer used two football players who played the safety position for its local NFL team to present the rules at the kick-off meeting.
- A shoe manufacturer devised a safety suggestion card to promote conversations between supervisors and workers. Each card identified a safety hazard in their area and the worker would make a suggestion on how to reduce or eliminate it. The supervisor and the group would then discuss the viability of the idea, sometimes quite heatedly.

Employees felt involved in the overall welfare of the company, and management gathered wonderful ideas for reducing injuries and costs.

- One restaurant franchise worried that it tried to address too many issues in its monthly safety meetings, resulting in missed details. So monthly meetings were changed to address one issue. Employees filled out cards requesting five solutions to the problem discussed. Entries with correct answers were entered into three drawings for gift certificates. All these entries were also eligible for a grand prize at the end of the year, if certain group goals were met.

By the six-month mark, more than 75% of the workforce regularly attended these gatherings. Employees found the meetings useful because they focused on problems and solutions impacting their every day lives. Also, the chance to win a gift certificate at every gathering was appealing.

- An auto manufacturer created a safety video with its own employees. The film was packed with information, but also contained a good number of outrageous situations and gimmicks. For example, an employee addressed fork lift safety by being buried under a pile of boxes. Another demonstrated the proper use of safety equipment and procedures by appearing to chop off his fingers, complete with gushing blood.
- A transportation and freight company rewarded its safest drivers with enrollment in the national truck driving championships. Participants were able to compete and demonstrate their skills as well as learn from other drivers. They then passed on this information to their co-workers in regular workshops.

## **SELECT THE RIGHT AWARD**

It is critical to know who makes up your target audience. Once you identify the group that needs to be motivated, find out more about them as individuals with the help of a questionnaire.

You'll need to know the ratio of males to females, percentage of married to single, how many have families, how they like to be rewarded, etc. The answers will guide your award choices.

Overall, it's best to offer a wide variety of awards so recipients can choose what they want. Select merchandise with trusted, brand name recognition and warranties. For on-going catalog programs, make sure participants are notified of changes. Choose awards that can be delivered within a timely manner. Quick turnaround time ensures participants remember they are being rewarded for a particular achievement.

## EVALUATE THE RESULTS

The end of the safety incentive is its most revealing part. If you established concrete, measurable goals and tracked your participants' behavior throughout the program, you'll have no trouble seeing the results of their efforts. Compare reports on production, accidents and lost-time to those from previous years in order to strengthen your case.

Be sure to ask the administrators if they encountered any snags in the running of the program and which elements they thought were most successful. Then consider all the tangible and intangible aspects of the program. This important analysis, documented and forwarded to management, will explain the success of the campaign and point out ways to refine future projects. Ask yourself questions such as:

- Did the program achieve its safety goals, improve morale or generate new ideas for operating more safely?
- Which incentive awards were most popular with recipients?
- Were there any unexpected benefits, such as renewed enthusiasm or an obvious improvement in workplace quality of life?
- Is there anything you'd do differently next time around?

### **An effective safety program can:**

- Reduce the number of accidents
- Improve employee morale
- Increase cooperation between management and labor
- Trim medical costs, insurance premiums and other expenses
- Develop and promote an overall safety culture

While it is important to get management's input on safety goals and concerns, also be sure to gather information from lower level supervisors and workers. These people provide valuable insight from first-hand experience.

As part of defining the goals of the program, create a brief, anonymous survey to learn what the rank-and-file consider to be the biggest risks.

Here are some sample questions:

- Have you experienced or witnessed any near miss accidents? What happened?
- Do incidents seem to occur more during any time of the day or month?
- Do you feel adequately trained to operate the equipment you use?
- Do your co-workers regularly observe safety guidelines regarding procedures and equipment? What are the greatest risks you think your face?

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

Q. Why focus on changing attitudes on safety when people only look at accident and lost-time figures?

A. Studies show 90% of all workplace injuries are based on attitude, behavior and culture. A true safety awareness develops when employees keep the safe way to perform their jobs foremost in their minds.

One place to start is the award presentation. In addition to crowing about the numbers, address how the goals were achieved. Discuss which specific behaviors changed. Stress the journey, not solely the destination. If management only talks about the numbers, so will employees.

A furniture manufacturer enjoyed great success with a program that addressed safety at home. The idea arose because 60% of the lost-time injuries reported occurred off the job, an alarming stat that mirrored the national average. The project began with basic first-aid training for all employees and developed into a complete wellness program. This approach helped people develop improved habits overall, not one set of behaviors for work and another for home.

Q. What is the smoothest way to transition a safety program from cash awards to merchandise?

A. One company enjoyed success with a point-based system because it retained characteristics of the cash program. Participants earned awards for lots of different activities, such as membership on safety committees, attending workshops and training co-workers on new procedures. Points also were awarded for group and companywide achievements. Employees exchanged them for gift cards.

This straightforward, fair program offered an appealing array of choices to a diverse workforce. Furthermore, the design was flexible enough to allow for short-term incentives under the larger program umbrella.

Q. We just acquired a company with a history of safety problems. What should we do first?

A. Your safety team should be part of the first group from corporate headquarters to visit the newly acquired company. This will reinforce the importance of a safe workplace to the new employees.

Also, as part of the safety training, bring people from the new facility to your company for several days of on-the-job training. Observing the differences firsthand is the best way for them to learn and be able to pass on the information.

Q. How do we encourage employees to tell co-workers they are doing something wrong?

A. Changing the "I'm not my brother's keeper" attitude is tough. Drive home the fact that everyone is responsible for the safety of his or her co-workers and team. If you see someone doing something potentially unsafe, it's your duty to step in. You don't want him to hurt himself or anyone else. Remind them they are not snitching, but just looking out for their buddies.

Q. Should we distribute information on near misses?

A. Within the company, absolutely. Such information should be shared so managers can be on the lookout for similar problems in their area. It shouldn't be seen as an embarrassment. After all, an accident was avoided. Such behavior should be rewarded, not punished.

## **POST- PROGRAM SURVEY**

Your safety incentive program isn't complete until you have heard from the participants. A final survey provides valuable information regarding whether the program met the participants' expectations, as well as ideas for subsequent incentives. A questionnaire should cover the following:

- Were the program goals and purpose clear to you?
- Were the objectives fair and reasonable?
- Did management promote the program well?
- Was the safety incentive run during an appropriate time?
- Did you receive enough safety training and support from management?
- Did the awards offered motivate you?
- Did you like how the awards were presented?
- Are you more aware of safety in the workplace as a result of this program?
- Do you believe your co-workers are more focused on safety?
- What changes would you make to future programs?