Safety Zone: Nine Keys to a Successful Accident Prevention Program

Creating a safe workplace for employees to perform their duties is essential in reducing accidents, injuries and illnesses that hurt employees and create financial liabilities for employers. Employers who emphasize safety and empower workers to take responsibility for their own and their co-workers' well-being is a sound and desirable business practice. Not only is focusing on safety the right thing for employees and their families, but it is also a real-world approach that can increase quality, loyalty, operational efficiencies and the company's overall financial performance.

The following steps can be used as a starting place to create and maintain an organization that continually identifies and analyzes its risks measured against existing controls and makes the needed improvements for the company's betterment.

1. Top management support and active leadership in safety must exist, and a written safety policy must be communicated to all employees.

2. Supervisors should be held accountable for the incidence of job-related injuries just as they are held responsible for production and quality objectives. Their performance evaluations should consider their units' safety performance.

3. Supervisors should be trained, have a solid understanding of and be responsible for the following activities:

- Job hazard analysis

- Regular workplace inspections

- Accident investigation

- Employee relations and motivational techniques

- Costs of accidents on production and company profits

- Safety rules and procedures

- Work closely with HR to return injured workers to productive activity within the medical restrictions assigned by the treating physician until they are released to full duty or otherwise released from medical care

Supervisors and reliable employees should be included in the rule and procedure-making process to ensure that correct data reflects actual working environments and conditions and ensures buy-in from all workers.

4. Effective training, particularly of new employees, is critical. In some industries, it is estimated that new employees (less than six months on the job) account for 30% of all injuries. Poor work habits or unsafe behavior should be corrected immediately. A formal system of disciplining employees for unsafe behavior is recommended; however, only after determining why an employee acted unsafely (root cause analysis).

- Highlight safety in all phases of the hiring process and integrate safe behavior into job training, starting on day one

- Make sure that leaders are continually emphasizing safety as a top priority and that it is integrated into all job functions

- Keep training relevant by aligning it with actual workplace hazards and conditions (see Job Hazard Analysis in 3)

- Train employees when new procedures are introduced

- Train employees when safety performance is not meeting objectives, and lack of understanding is identified

- Train employees on the hazards of chemicals and proper controls using Safety Data Sheets available from the supplier or manufacturer

- Contact your workers' compensation insurance carrier to see what training resources are available to you as a policyholder

5. Establish a safety committee that includes top management, front-line supervisors and production personnel. Safety committees must discuss accidents, solutions, hazards and their correction. They must be focused on priorities, and management should make every effort to implement the solutions they offer. Meetings should have set agendas to avoid them becoming "gripe sessions."

6. Accidents can still occur, so therefore it is necessary to have post-accident procedures in place:

- Proper first aid training, supplies and emergency medical response communication numbers/procedures posted and easily accessed

- Prompt and thorough accident investigation

- Prompt claims reporting to your insurance company

- A return-to-work program

7. The importance of having proper hiring procedures in place cannot be overstated. All those involved in the selection and interviewing of job candidates should have a thorough understanding of the various hiring stages and what inquiries may legally be made in each stage to be confident that the new hire is physically able to perform the work and will adhere to the company's safety and other requirements. Additionally, to ensure that you know you have properly obtained information about any pre-existing medical conditions or disabilities being brought into the workplace. Applicable employment laws will guide this important step. The employer should seek human resource experts and/or legal counsel to confirm they are complying with the many local, state and federal laws that may apply.

8. Actively solicit, encourage and act on employees' concerns, safety suggestions and ideas.

9. An incentive program might be adopted to motivate improved performance in safety. However, a program should only be implemented after the other elements of your safety program are in place and working. Any incentive program should be meaningful and fair, and it should be evaluated periodically to ensure that it is effective and producing the desired effect. A common complaint about incentive programs is that they tend to suppress reporting of incidents and injuries—something you certainly want to avoid.

For additional resources and other safety and risk management subjects, visit the AmTrust Loss Control website: https://amtrustfinancial.com/loss-control.

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