

Assessing Your Company's Safety Strategies

Written by: Bob Dietzel, Co-founder and Principal, KMRD Partners, Inc.

WHY IT MAY BE TIME FOR A WORKPLACE SAFETY COMMITTEE CHECKUP

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 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 well-being. 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 policyholders between 1994 and 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 2016 program.

Participating risks have higher total claim frequency than nonparticipating risks, every year.

Participating risks had better loss ratios than nonparticipating risks in only 10 of the past 22 years and in only two of the past 10 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 counterintuitive, 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 that 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 from C-level leaders.

Training & Implementation

Training employees to become aware of and 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 or the stress of operations.

A 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 both 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 they already know 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, you must 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 the program more effective.

Communication

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. 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 jobsite safety.


Record-Keeping

What can be more boring than record-keeping? At the same time, what can be more important when documenting the past to work towards a better future? Accurate and detailed record-keeping is more than a vital, essential element of every workplace safety program. It is also a necessary requirement towards satisfying Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requirements and additional regulations.

Record-keeping creates accountable and effective business management, while also 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. Record-keepers 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. 



About the Author

Bob Dietzel is co-founder and principal of KMRD Partners, Inc., a risk and human capital management consulting and insurance brokerage firm serving clients worldwide. KMRD works to protect clients' assets by reducing their cost of risk. Contact Dietzel at bdietzel@kmrpartners.com. Visit kmrpartners.com.

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