Ten Components for a Successful Safety Program

One of the things I enjoy most about being a safety consultant is that every day brings forth new and dynamic adventures. Today I could be teaching employees at a daycare center. Tomorrow I might be observing a cremation. And the next day may be spent watching employees manufacture high tech automobile parts used to build a sports car. I have the privilege of assisting great companies by helping them fix their broken safety programs.

In this article, I want to share my observations, the tools I use and the successful strategies I have implemented across my client base, to help you make your company a safer place to work.

There really is no magic trick or trade secret to make one company safer than another. It simply takes a lot of hard work. But I’ll try to make things easier with my list of Ten Components for a Successful Safety Program:

1. Safety Committee Development

Safety committees manage a vital part of your safety programs. They have a structure that supports specific activities, such as accident review, written program development, event or project planning and much more. So what makes a safety committee effective? The first thing is diversity. The best investments begin with a diverse portfolio. An investment in safety is no different. Membership must be a dynamic group of individuals from all parts of the company. The team should include representation from management to front line staff, such as drivers, sales, R&D, production workers, administration, shipping and so on. Every department should have representation on the committee.

In some States, such as Pennsylvania, safety committees must be certified. The certification process can be an arduous. I recommend you seek outside help. Utilize a consultant or risk management service to help you certify your safety committee. It will make things easier. This is the first step in establishing a strong foundation.

2. Housekeeping and Facility Appearance
One way to determine which parts of your business need the most attention is to simply look around. How does the place look? By starting a housekeeping campaign in all departments, you can get rid of the clutter including trash, unused and unsafe equipment, and outdated stock.

Housekeeping and facility appearance also play a major role during third party inspections. Inspectors will be influenced by the appearance of your landscaping, paint, floors, walls and furniture. Think of it as a job interview. Hiring decisions are often made in the first five seconds of an interview based solely upon appearance. So, if you want to do well in an inspection make sure that your facility is clean, tidy and sanitary. (An added benefit to keeping a clean facility: improved employee morale.)

3 Benchmarking And Data Gathering

To have a good safety program you have to dig deep and look through old records, including injury and accident data, to develop spreadsheets, graphs, pivot tables and charts that can help you identify trends. This can be challenging but it is important. Benchmarking like this will help you identify the low hanging fruit that needs your safety committee’s attention.

Another way to gather data is to identify hazard exposures. We do this by conducting a job hazard analysis or job safety analysis. These studies are commonly referred to as JSAs. JSAs are segmented into three distinct sections:

1. The job “task” section which describes the employee’s work tasks to be performed.
2. The “hazard” section which describes the potential hazards the employee is exposed to while performing the tasks.
3. The “control” section which lists control measures necessary to protect employees from the hazards associated with their job tasks. Controls can be in the form of an administrative change, engineering upgrades, or even Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). OSHA expects us to implement PPE as a last resort to protect employees.

4 Setting Priorities

Here is where you ask yourself, “What’s really important to my company?” or “What are our exposures?” For example, if you haven’t had OSHA on site in a few years, your research may reveal areas of non-compliance. Therefore, it would be prudent to focus on gaining OSHA compliance. Perhaps your research reveals that workers’ compensation claims have become an issue. Then it would be advisable to focus on reducing workplace accidents and injuries and reviewing the methods used to manage those claims.
I have learned that placing production needs over the need for safety and compliance is a recipe for disaster. Never compromise safety for production initiatives. It will result in losses far greater than the cost of safety. Most of the companies that contact East Coast Rick Management for assistance with critical safety issues got into trouble by placing production over safety.

5 Developing Written Safety Programs

With so many laws, regulations, and standards, it is nearly impossible for the average safety professional to keep up with the scope, changes and application of them all. Therefore, having a well-written, fully compliant safety program, one that won’t collect dust on your shelf, requires a lot of research.

I can’t tell you how many times companies have made good faith efforts to develop written safety programs, only to find out later from a compliance officer that they made crucial errors in their judgment of the rules and their interpretation of the legal aspects of the standards. Well written safety polices lay the groundwork of your company’s operations and safety programs. Their development should not be taken lightly. It is really best to ask for professional help.

6 Training

Now let’s talk about training--my favorite topic! As Louis Pasteur said, “Chance favors the prepared mind”. Training is the one safety tool that returns the most measurable results. It’s not until the training is delivered that we really start to see the fruits of our effort.

Unfortunately, many companies fail to train because they believe it is better to forfeit safety training than to lose a couple of hours of production time to accommodate that training. The truth is that one moderate accident will cost much more than weeks of production. They fail to consider every incident-related expense, from the loss of a productive employee, the time needed to complete the accident investigation and report, the increased insurance rates, poor moral and even citations. There is no replacement for good training, given at regular intervals. It is the best investment any company can make toward success. Like any good investment, delivering good quality training requires planning and forethought.

First we need to consider the adult learner and the basics of good curriculum design. Then, we must decide what we hope to accomplish with this training. Ask yourself, “What can’t they do now that we want them to be able to do?”

Each training initiative should begin with a hit list of your objectives. Present your objectives clearly, using every method possible, including orally, visually (handouts or
power point) and practically. Utilizing all these methods together helps the adult learner plant information into their long term memory.

In some instances it is also appropriate to have testing. Testing is a good way to gauge whether or not the target audience was able to achieve the training objectives. Documented testing also provides protection when it comes to regulatory compliance. A record of an employee taking a test is one of the best ways to show an OSHA compliance officer that your employees have been adequately trained.

Most importantly, training is the best way to protect employees, property and your company’s bottom line.

7 Ongoing Evaluation

Evaluation can be challenging because it is dynamic. Let’s say you are a trucking company or you have a fleet of vehicles. A great way to evaluate the effectiveness of your safety programs would be to conduct behind-the-wheel or trail-behind evaluations of your drivers. Drivers tend to do better when they know they are being watched.

Another way to evaluate the success of your safety programs is to simply look at your OSHA 300 logs every quarter and compare them from year to year. You can calculate “days away from work” rates, “transitional duty day” rates and “overall” injury rates, which can help you determine the success of your programs.

8 Employee Accountability Programs (Discipline)

Some people interpret accountability as discipline. In reality, that’s what it is. But I don’t like to call it that. I prefer to call it accountability because at the end of the day, employees are accountable for their actions.

OSHA requires us to have disciplinary programs. They should be progressive, meaning they should start out soft with verbal and written warnings and then progress to suspension and eventually termination. Without a good accountability program you cannot expect all employees to follow the rules. It is a necessary evil. Don’t forget: the prepared mind fairs much better in the safety arena than the punished mind. In other words, if you take the time to train and evaluate your employees, you will spend much less time disciplining them.

9 Frequent and Regular Inspections

Frequent and regular inspections are required for OSHA compliance. The purpose of these inspections is to reveal hazards or potential hazards that employees can be exposed to. The frequency of inspections will vary by industry, but can range from once per shift to daily, to monthly. Blood was shed somewhere or these laws would not exist. At the very
least, following OSHA’s minimum standards, like frequent inspections, goes a long way towards protecting employees and businesses.

10 Program Maintenance

Another component of implementing a robust safety program is ongoing maintenance. Anyone that drives a car knows the importance of this factor. In order to maintain sustainability when it comes to reducing accidents and injuries, good maintenance of your safety programs is essential. Maintenance can include instructor training, regular housekeeping, practical exercises, Material Safety Data Sheet updates, Chemical inventory updates, written program rewrites and retention of all safety-related documents, including training records.

Closing

Developing a robust safety program is never easy, but it is an essential part of keeping your business productive. Some companies think they cannot afford such a program because the cost of hiring a full-time risk management staff is prohibitive. For those companies, and many others, outsourcing risk management needs is a wise economic decision. A good risk management firm should offer you a well-seasoned team of professionals at a fraction of the cost.

However you get there, success in the safety arena is possible. With careful planning, continual vigilance, constant reevaluation, faithful maintenance and effective training you can achieve measurable results.

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