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The Importance of Safe Behavior

(Cannot Be Stressed Enough)

No municipality ever wants to see one of its employees injured, especially a life-changing one, or worse, life-ending. Municipal leaders also know that when insurance companies pay out for employee injuries, future premiums will go up, which impacts budgets negatively.

Therefore, municipalities must work to keep their employees safe and invest in personal protective equipment and training.

Although the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) does not have complete jurisdiction over municipalities, municipal leaders should follow the administration's rules for keeping employees safe.

Even when fully OSHA-compliant, many municipalities and employers continue to have injured workers.

DuPont conducted a study of over 40,000 injuries and found that unsafe actions caused over 80% of them. The study illustrates that in order to reduce injuries, the culture of safety must be improved.

When Paul O'Neill became CEO at Alcoa, his first announcement was a plan to overhaul the company's safety program, which was already considered excellent.

O'Neill understood that safety touched every employee, no matter what position they held. Safety was where he wanted to start to change the organization's culture – to make it a better-performing, better-behaving organization.

Safety became everyone's responsibility, not just that of the loss-control people on staff. As a result, Alcoa's productivity soared, and injuries dramatically

were reduced, proving safety and productivity can work in harmony.

In order to reap the benefits of a robust behavior-based safety program, municipalities must be ready for a project that will take more than one meeting – it's a marathon, not a sprint.

What it Takes

The following is a general outline of what it takes to establish and maintain a behavior-based safety system.

Mission statement: Municipal leaders must be involved in crafting the mission statement that makes it clear that safety is a priority over productivity. Everyone must understand that doing something safe does not mean doing

continues on page 38...

something slowly, but losing sight of safety in favor of production or speed certainly can lead to unsafe behavior. Ultimately, those who will be held accountable should be involved in setting deeper objectives to understand what needs to be done.

Benchmarking: To determine improvement, there must be measurements and records, which include noting injury frequency and severity. These will allow a borough to compare its results to a peer's. For better tracking, the records should note near misses and observed unsafe actions. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics publishes injury recordable rates (frequency) and days away, restricted duty, or transitional duty, (DART) rates, so municipalities can benchmark themselves.

Keep in mind that injury frequency, severity, and near misses should all have specific numeric goals that are reduced over time. This is one way to determine the success of the program.

The municipality should monitor supervisors to establish whether they are doing their jobs in terms of safety. Also a line of communication for feedback from bottom to top should be established.

For example, an employee may feel his or her supervisor is ignoring a situation that has been brought to the supervisor's attention. In that case, the employee

must feel comfortable going over the supervisor's head to resolve the problem and must be able to do so without fear of repercussions. Employees also should know the chain of command.

Establishing accountability and a peer-review process: Accountability should encompass elected officials reviewing leadership and management, management reviewing supervisors, and supervisors reviewing workers.

There also should be a peer-review process that includes a co-worker, maybe acting as the safety person of the day, or simply a longer-tenured employee in a workgroup observing the operations of their co-workers. This is an important step because a supervisor may not always be present or even fully aware of all the exposures associated with doing a particular job.

A checklist of both unsafe and safe behaviors should be created for supervisors and peer observers to use. Measuring and recording is the key to this process. Ongoing training for observers will be needed, so they can learn from each other as well as from outside trainers or coaches. More importantly, corrections must be recorded in the training manual.

Responsibility: Organizational responsibility levels are a two-way street, up and down the organization. Those below should

feel comfortable going "up the ladder" to ensure those above address key issues and situations. All goals and actions should be results-oriented. Everything requires reporting and measuring; otherwise, it is meaningless and without consequences.

Accountability

The levels of accountability, both employee and organizational, include:

- Personal – Each employee is responsible for his or her own actions.
- Team – There is shared accountability for a workgroup or team's performance through peer review.
- Organizational – There is internal accountability up and down the chain of command and externally to those working within and on behalf of the municipality.

Behavior-based Safety

The following is an example of what is necessary when implementing a behavior-based safety program:

A delivery truck shows up at 4:30 p.m. on a Thursday with materials for a project. The loading dock at the municipal building has a truck loaded with materials to be used at the project the following day.

The driver of the delivery vehicle wants to leave as quickly as possible, so he asks for help unloading his truck. The supervisor sends employees out into the parking lot to start unloading the truck. In the course of unloading the materials, an employee falls off the back of the truck, shattering his elbow.

That employee was put in harm's way because the supervisor was focused on getting the truck out as quickly as possible instead of on safety.

The fully loaded truck could have been moved to allow the delivery truck to come in and be safely unloaded. Additionally, moving the truck would have taken minutes and probably would have shortened the amount of time needed to unload it.



This injury could have been prevented by the supervisor simply telling the driver to wait until the other truck was moved so he could pull in.

As a result of the incident, the employee had permanent problems with his elbow, and the employer saw an increased experience modifier, resulting in over \$130,000 in additional premiums, all because the supervisor put the perception of productivity ahead of safety.

The council suspended the supervisor without pay for two weeks to reinforce to all employees and supervisors that the municipality would not tolerate unsafe actions or shortcuts.

To have the message "heard" by employees, employers like a borough must reinforce the safety message with consequences.

The goal of every organization should not simply be OSHA compliance but a safer, more productivity-oriented culture. Only then will behavioral safety become employees' mantra.



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