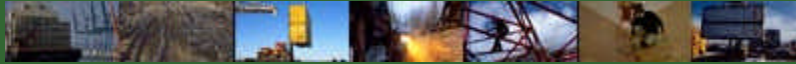




Supervisors' Safety Update

Ideas and Strategies for Leaders



SSU 2002-06

Responsible & Accountable For Safety Up & Down the Line!

By SeaBright Insurance Loss Control

If you supervise other personnel, you probably didn't start in that position. Most likely you moved up through the ranks over time—from laborer or apprentice to foreman, supervisor, and perhaps even manager. Looking back at each stage of your experience, try to recall who most influenced your work performance. Perhaps you knew the names of your company's top managers, but wasn't it your *immediate* boss that determined how hard and how safely you worked? Your supervisor decided, "how things are done around here," and you did what you were told!



Peter Drucker, a prominent management consultant wrote: "What the boss says and does, his most casual remarks...tend to appear to his subordinates as calculated, planned and meaningful." This applies to the "boss" at every level. So you must hold your subordinates accountable for safe work practices as well as for production and your supervisor must hold you accountable. This is the way it has worked in every organization that has achieved an outstanding safety record.

CEO's, risk managers and loss control consultants often talk about the need for supervisory *responsibility* and *accountability* for safety, since supervisors have direct control over employees' actions and attitudes on the front line. The terms *responsible* and *accountable* are used interchangeably. However, according to Webster, there are differences: *Responsible* implies holding a duty or trust. *Accountable* suggests that specific consequences exist for failing to perform those *responsibilities*.

Production vs. Safety Accountability

In nearly all work environments, people are held accountable for their production duties. You'd better build, assemble, deliver or produce the expected output of "widgets" or you won't last long in the job!

But holding employees and supervisors accountable for their safety responsibilities is not such a common practice. If it were, we would have fewer accidents. In addition to monitoring the safe work practices of employees, a supervisor's safety duties generally are—or should be—to conduct new employee orientation, safety training, accident investigations, safety meetings and safety inspections.

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However, if supervisors are not held *accountable* for consistently performing those tasks, motivation tends to weaken. That seems to be human nature. We tend to repeat behaviors that bring us some kind of reward, and neglect behaviors no one pays attention to. To overcome this “squeaky wheel” syndrome, accountability systems are often used. It is important to evaluate supervisors’ safety performance as well as their productivity, quality control, and scheduling goals.

Another Name for Incentive Programs?

Perhaps the term Incentive Program comes to mind at this point, because so-called “incentive” programs generally keep track of safety performance and reward good results with prizes. These include everything from coffee cups to free vacation trips.

But true accountability systems go several steps further. They monitor *both* good and poor safety results. Safety leadership may be recognized in a supervisor’s job performance review. One supervisor’s accident statistics may be compared with another’s. In some cases, accident costs are charged to the work unit where the incident took place, directly affecting the department’s budget.

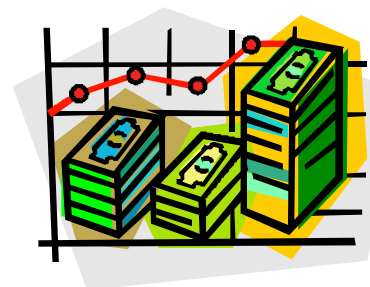
In terms of incentives, gifts and prizes seem to get the most attention from hourly workers (but never underestimate the value of praising an individual’s safe work behavior). Things that affect the “bottom line” generally get the most attention from the management team.

Three Key Components:

The most common elements of accountability systems are (1) measuring safety performance, or “effort,” (2) measuring achieved safety goals, or “results,” and (3) measuring accident costs—allocating them to the work unit that incurred them. All three strategies may be applied.

Measuring Effort: This strategy asks the question, “Are supervisors meeting their safety responsibilities?” In this case, management doesn’t just trust that supervisors are doing everything right, but requires them to document specific safety tasks, such as conducting new employee orientation, safety meetings, accident investigations, inspections, etc. The assumption is, if these tasks are consistently completed, accidents will be reduced or eliminated. There is no guarantee of this, of course, but safety research and theory strongly supports this belief. Like preventive maintenance on our cars and immunization shots for our children, research shows that prevention strategies are worth the effort.

Measuring Results: This strategy asks the question, “Are the number severity of accidents going up or down?” Some accountability systems goals for supervisors, such as the number of time loss accidents, or the of lost time days, over a period of time. When goals are reached, supervisors get an “attaboy” from the boss. Or, the whole workforce pride in the sign posted outside the facility, which says “199 Days with Loss Accidents!” If goals are not reached, everyone starts paying closer



and establish number

takes No Time attention.

There is a problem with this system, however. If safety performance, or effort, isn’t measured *as well as* accident statistics, how do you know if the results were just a matter of luck? A supervisor can’t take either credit or blame. Compare this with production goals. You can be sure that when production goes up or down, someone is trying to analyze the reasons—it’s not trusted to luck!

Measuring Costs: This strategy asks the question, “Which division of the company is most responsible for accident costs?” Charge-Back systems pro-rate the costs of accidents to the particular department or facility that incurred them, rather than having the whole organization share the burden evenly. This seems fair, doesn’t it? But what if one division is much larger than others, and would be expected to have increased exposure to accidents? What if one division has more hazardous operations, so the potential for more serious accidents exists? What if different circumstances exist at different locations, so that medical expenses, claims costs and other factors that impact insurance expenses are not equal?

Developing a charge back system that’s fair is a challenge, but many companies have found formulas and methods for doing it. Properly managed, those methods can be highly effective. When accidents are seen to impact profits, management puts prevention higher on the priority list—studying not only “what” happened in each department, but also “why?”

What’s the Best Accountability System?

The most appropriate accountability system is often a function of company size. The larger and more complex the operation, the greater the need to formally monitor and measure safety activities, accident trends and claim costs; with a large workforce, cause and effect is difficult to determine intuitively. An accountability system should first of all make sense to the management team, which needs to recognize the following:

- ◆ Rising workers’ compensation costs *can* be controlled.
- ◆ Management’s *visible* support of the safety program is the most important factor.
- ◆ Employees tend to take their safety responsibilities as seriously as their *supervisor* does.
- ◆ Supervisors tend to take their safety responsibilities as seriously as *their boss* does.
- ◆ Safety responsibilities can’t be fulfilled until they are clearly communicated, and everyone knows what’s *expected* of them.

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Examples of Systems That are Working:

In one company surveyed, supervisors are directly accountable for their safety responsibilities. Employees at all levels receive an annual safety evaluation, which examines both safe work behaviors and accidents. Workers’ compensation losses are also charged back to the responsible department. This system reduced the firm’s workers’ compensation premium from \$1.2 million to \$325,000 in four years.

Another company reported implementing an accountability system that reduced their experience modification factor from 1.78 to .78 in about five years. Supervisors are required to document safety activities, and both individuals and teams receive financial rewards for accident free performance. Safety is a company-wide effort in this firm, beginning with hands-on interest from top management.

Many such success stories exist. Most of these firms measure safety activity as well as accident trends, and connect these to financial rewards or charge-back systems. The most successful firms keep their program flexible, involve all levels of personnel, and give their system plenty of time to develop.

Holding Line Workers Accountable

As part of the management team, a supervisor’s important responsibility in addition to production is to assure that all employees complete their tasks safely. Workers who fail to use appropriate personal protective equipment or fall protection, or who violate other company safety rules, must be held accountable through appropriate channels within your organization. This may involve the human resources department, union shop stewards, business agents, etc.

Disciplinary actions could consist of verbal warnings, written warnings, suspension, possible loss of seniority, and maybe even termination. Whatever the case, if workers are not held accountable, they'll probably continue to violate the rules, take short-cuts in their job tasks, develop unsafe work habits, and perhaps end up in the hospital! If employees fail to work safely due to lack of knowledge, the finger could be pointed toward their supervisor for not training and coaching them properly.

If you are a supervisor, we expect that you perform your safety responsibilities because you understand the important role you play in preventing accidents. You are looking out for the well being of your employees and their families, as well as looking to increase productivity for the company! For this, you deserve to be rewarded with recognition! An accountability system will do this. For others who do not fulfill their safety responsibilities as *you* do, the system will also make this known.

