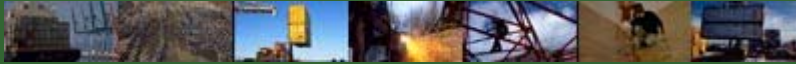




# Supervisors' Safety Update

Ideas and Strategies for Leaders



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## Why Safety Programs Fail

By SeaBright Insurance Loss Control

**H**ow effective is your company's safety program? Does it *really* prevent accidents and injuries? Your company's written program may fill a six-inch binder with little room to spare. It may address all the major elements of safety and loss control known to the profession. It may contain all the essential forms and checklists, customized and printed on the company's letterhead. But if costly accidents and painful injuries continue to occur, it would appear that your program no matter how thorough is not "effective."

**Reasons for Failure:** One reason for failure may be that all the essential safety program elements are *not* in place—key pieces are missing. This problem can be easily solved with the many resources available—model policies, sample forms and experienced consultants can help fill in the gaps in the safety program's structure. Your SeaBright Loss Control Consultants are available with such resources. A safety plan, like a construction blueprint, must not omit important details or the structure will be weak. All the gaps must be filled. Widespread input and agreement on the program must also be obtained. If the program is seen as the safety director's *one-man-show*, the rest of the company will not feel ownership. People need to take part in making decisions that affect their lives and work.

But although your safety manual must spell out the best possible plan, it cannot guarantee action or compliance with that plan. A common reason for failure may be that you have only a "paper program." If a Safety & Health Auditor walks in and asks to see your safety manual, you can hopefully hand it over with pride. But if the inspector's walk-through of your plant or project shows unsafe work practices and uncontrolled hazards, safety is clearly not part of the corporate culture. Have the written policies been shared with employees and have they become standard procedures up and down the line?

**How Do You Measure Success?** A comprehensive safety plan that everyone follows is the primary action goal for an "effective" safety program. The next question to ask is, how do we measure "effectiveness?" Let's start by setting the end goal extremely high—zero accidents and injuries! If the goal is not this high, what chance will you have of even coming close? Can you settle for an end goal of "fewer" injuries and fatalities? Each improvement in accident rates is surely a measure of success, but the ultimate goal should be let *no one* be hurt while working for you!

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**There Are Proven Goals and Strategies:** If the goal is zero accidents and injuries, and the strategy is a comprehensive safety program, what tactics or approaches will help reach this ambitious goal? The need for a written safety plan is primary and a checklist at the end of this article can be used to help evaluate your own written program. Other elements of safety management are less tangible, but critical for success. Research has proven how important these are. Consider your own company in terms of these five elements and the part you play in helping to achieve the

## 1. Management Commitment

What the boss says and does is of primary importance to employees. His or her values become workforce values. If safety is viewed as a priority, if a written management policy is published widely, and if the boss rewards safe work behavior and reprimands carelessness, employees will accept those standards. They will most likely take pride in them too. Countless safety leadership examples describe managers who “walk the worksite, praise safety procedures and support a zero accident goal.” These senior managers believe “the buck stops with them” and expect the same of their managers or supervisors when it comes to assuring a safe work environment. So, as a supervisor, you can let upper managers know how important their role is in motivating a safety culture. Let them know that their leadership and examples make a difference.

## 2. Supervisor Commitment

But what if the workers you supervise have little or no contact with senior management—perhaps yours is a very large company with wide spread operations, or moving, changing crews.

Crewmembers may not even know the names of the senior management team, let alone have met them. They may never have seen the “formal written safety policy”—or may not even be able to read such a policy. So who sets the safety work standards for these employees? Who communicates safety rules and safe work behavior? There are supervisors that might answer that the Safety Director or the Personnel Department provides new employee training. That’s where they learn “how things are done around here.” Perhaps this is true for their initial training....

**Failure of supervisors to demand safe work behavior is what truly makes safety programs fail.**

But it is not senior management who monitors the day-to-day operations that can ensure accident prevention is a part of the work practices, it is immediate supervisors and foremen! In fact, the buck really stops with you! *Failure of supervisors to demand safe work behavior is what truly makes safety programs fail.*

## 3. Both Safety AND Production

Anyone who works with day-to-day operations knows that competition can exist between safety, productivity and quality. A company measures its success on production and profit. Time and money spent on safety training, personal protective equipment, and accident investigation are sometimes viewed as hard on the budget. This happens because the company’s true accident costs are rarely calculated. Traditional accounting principals principally measure labor and materials, and ultimate profit. However, only recently have we begun to recognize the tangible and intangible costs of accidents and injuries. These indirect costs of accidents include the cost of equipment damage, medical and time loss payments, production down time, personnel replacement and training, the effect of injuries on employee morale, and the cost of potential regulatory citations as a result of the incident.

Companies that produce a tangible product can easily analyze this relationship. If they compare the direct and indirect costs of accidents with the profit made by producing their unique “widget”, they often receive a wake-up call. For example, how many widgets must be produced to make up for the average time-loss back injury claim? The numbers can be alarming. It is even more difficult, but not impossible for firms who operate on a contract bid system, to calculate the degree to which accidents affect production and profits. Profit margins in today’s economy are increasingly slim. An effective safety program protects the health of the company as well as the workers.

## 4. Profitable Supervisors

Accident cost accounting may not be a concern for all supervisors, but the system of measuring performance and accountabilities is changing. Many company senior managers are now reviewing not only the production and profitability of their supervisors, but also the safety results for the job or department. What some companies are finding is that their “best” production supervisors are also incurring an unacceptable number of both minor and severe injuries. When the cost of the supervisor’s poor safety record is added together with their production numbers, the results can be surprising. Many times the company’s “best” production supervisors are not the most profitable for the company. They may produce

more widgets, or complete their projects ahead of schedule, but if they don't attend to accident prevention, they probably do not deserve a production bonus for their work at increasing the company's true bottom line. An accurate cost accounting system would reward supervisors with the lowest accident rates as well as good production levels. These go hand-in-hand.

## 5. The Importance of Teamwork

The most successful firms hold monthly meetings where safety and loss control issues are addressed by top management, along with production and profit matters. Members of this team include safety personnel and representatives from various company divisions. Visiting superintendents report on their projects. Successes are recognized. Problems are analyzed and solutions proposed. When accident rates are low, you can bet that the upper management team is involved in the safety program.

Production workers can also help build the corporate safety culture. Safety committees bring elected workers together to review accidents, injuries, near misses and may provide input on production problems. If reports and recommendations do not reach upper management, the committee's efforts may be a waste of time. The committee needs to know that their participation is valued. A sure sign of this is when managers periodically visit and take an interest in safety committee meetings.

A company safety director performs a critical function in helping to plan, advise and coordinate the safety program. There are many regulatory issues that must be studied, communicated and followed, and he or she provides leadership for this. If the safety director is expected to do everything alone, you can be sure the program will fail. A successful safety program is a wide scale cooperative effort.

**So, Why Do Safety Programs Fail?** It would be simplistic to suggest that just the five elements discussed are the magic bullets in themselves. These are necessary but they are not always sufficient. No single formula will be right for every company, since each differ in size, structure, industry hazards and safety regulations. New firms or changing operations also need to take time to create an effective safety system that will be an integral part of the company and its processes.

Nevertheless, in review, failure is more likely when the following conditions exist:

- *No written program:* Safety programs will be ineffective if they are left to everyone's memory and "common sense," rather than having a customized written program that includes specific policies and procedures to be followed. If the orchestra has no sheet music, everyone will play a different tune. Without an established safety plan, no one will know what is expected of him or her and will behave accordingly.
- *No follow through on the written program:* Beware if a "paper program" has been created but lacks supportive training and monitoring at all levels. The safety manual will generally sit on a shelf, gathering dust, instead of becoming a reality throughout the company. It will be dusted off only when the OSHA inspector comes to call.
- *Lack of noticeable senior management support:* When senior management is not actively, visibly committed to accident and injury prevention, a lack of leadership for the company safety culture will exist. In this case, others will place little value on safety goals or employee well-being.
- *No supervisory safety accountabilities or responsibilities:* Often supervisors fail to realize the direct influence they have on safe work behavior. They take too little responsibility to provide training and monitor safety performance. They are not held accountable for accidents and injuries of their crew members.
- *Focus only on productivity and quality:* Overemphasis upon productivity and quality, at the expense of accident prevention. This undervalues the costs of accidents and miscalculates profit margins. It can also motivate work behavior that increases health and safety risks.

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- *Lack of an integrated safety program:* Lack of teamwork in planning, developing and supporting the company's safety program means few people take ownership. Most consider safety as "someone else's job." The safety program succeeds when everybody—up and down the line—realizes that preventing accidents is everyone's responsibility.

**Take a Close Look at Your Company's Program.** As a supervisor, you are surely concerned about the well-being of those you oversee. The last thing you want is for one of your workers to be injured or killed. So what can you do?

- First of all, remember how much influence you have over the safe work behavior of those who report directly to you. Make it consistently clear "how things are done around here." Remember to "catch people doing things right," instead of just criticizing them for doing things wrong. People tend to repeat behavior that is praised.
- Secondly, remember that accident prevention requires a safety "system"—defined as "*a group of interrelated or interdependent components forming a complex whole.*" The safety program checklist provided makes it clear that there are many pieces to a safety program so it must be customized and supported by personnel throughout the company. As with any complex endeavor, it will take time and focus before it becomes a routine part of the "system" which is the total makeup of your company. There must be leadership. No one can do it alone; everyone makes it happen together. Perhaps this checklist will help you or co-workers make your program safer and better. Perhaps you will find you have a few gaps to fill. □

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## SAFETY/LOSS CONTROL PROGRAM CHECKLIST

<b>1. SAFETY/LOSS CONTROL POLICIES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Written safety manual provided for all divisions?			
Signed and published management policy statement?			
Responsibilities defined for all key personnel?			
Safety performance included in performance evaluations?			
<b>2. HIRING/PERSONNEL PROGRAM</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Hiring & Human Resources Policy and Procedures written?			
Hiring forms selected/utilized (applications, job skills form, etc.)?			
Job Descriptions developed?			
References checked?			
Pre-Hire Substance Abuse testing?			
Pre-placement medical exams given?			
Pre-hire or annual audiometric tests given?			
Special licenses required/checked? (e.g.: CDL)			
<b>3. EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION &amp; SAFETY TRAINING</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Safety Orientation Procedures written?			
New Employee Orientation Checklist used?			
Safety Rules written; Disciplinary procedures defined and enforced?			
Employee handbook or handouts provided?			
Walk-around tour of facility provided, with hazards identified?			
Job-specific safety training and demonstrations provided?			
Appropriate personal protective equipment furnished?			
Instruction and demonstrations provided for personal protective equipment?			
Back care training provided?			
Material handling equipment furnished?			
<b>4. SAFETY COMMITTEE &amp;/OR SAFETY MEETINGS</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Senior Management meetings include safety/accident discussions?			
Employee safety committee guidelines written?			
Committee members & chairman elected?			
Safety committee members trained for their role?			
Committee and/or crew safety meeting records kept?			
Meetings held at least monthly?			

<b>5. SAFETY INSPECTIONS</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Safety inspection procedures and schedule written?			
Area-specific inspection checklists used?			
Vehicle & equipment maintenance checklists used?			
Crane inspections/certification completed?			
System for employees to report hazards, with follow-up responsibilities?			
Inspections by both management and employee groups?			
System for follow-up action and correction?			
<b>6. ACCIDENT REPORTING &amp; FOLLOW-UP</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Accident reporting procedures written?			
Supervisor accident report form(s) utilized?			
Team follow-up for serious incidents or near misses?			
Accident investigation training provided?			
Reports routed to corporate office within the allotted time?			
Return-to-Work / Modified Duty program in place?			
OSHA300 log maintained?			
<b>7. PROJECT PREPARATION</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Construction Pre-Project checklist followed?			
Subcontractor Screening/Monitoring procedures?			
First Aid/CPR requirements met?			
Safety bulletin board adequate?			
Fire Extinguisher inspections current?			
First Aid kits inspected and stocked?			
Eye wash station(s) clean & unobstructed?			
<b>8. SPECIAL WRITTEN PROGRAMS &amp; TRAINING? (Varies by industry)</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Assured Grounding or GFCI Program?			
Bloodborne Pathogens Plan?			
Confined Space Work?			
Emergency Response/Evacuation Plan & Map?			
Fall Protection Plan?			
Fleet Safety Program?			

Hazard Communication?			
Hazmat Program?			
Hearing Conservation Program?			
Lockout/Tagout Program?			
Process Safety Program?			
Respiratory Protection, Training, Fit Testing?			
Other?			
<b>9. SAFETY RECOGNITION PROGRAM</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Program policies & procedures developed?			
Goals and standards clarified to all?			
Safety performance monitored and recognized?			
Accident statistics monitored for success?			
<b>10. SUPERVISOR /FOREMAN TRAINING SESSIONS</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Safety responsibilities and accountabilities defined			
New employee orientation			
Coaching skills			
Safety inspection techniques			
Job Hazard Analysis			
Conducting effective safety meetings			
Accident investigations & reporting			
Return-to-Work program			