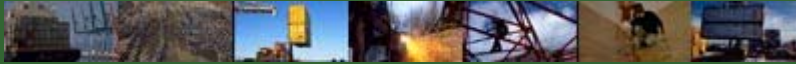




Supervisors' Safety Update

Ideas and Strategies for Leaders



SSU 2005 - 06

DEMONSTRATING THE VALUE OF SAFETY TO EMPLOYEES

By SeaBright Insurance Loss Control

The “buzz” word today is “VALUE”, whether you're in the hardware store, a car dealership or about to get your house painted.

The word value is defined in part, by *Webster* as: “relative worth, utility, or importance; something intrinsically valuable or desirable.”

One of your many challenges as a supervisor is identifying how to consistently develop and maintain safety awareness or safety values among the workers on your crew. A key goal is to inspire within them the ability to choose “safe” work activities that develop into habits. If you don't show them that there is value in performing the work in a prescribed manner or don't correct any unsafe work methods, have you adequately fulfilled your supervisory responsibilities? For instance, do your workers fully understand why fall protection equipment should be worn in certain circumstances, what those circumstances are, how to obtain and use the equipment, what the benefits are for wearing such and what the consequences are if they don't? In other words, have you emphasized payoffs as well as procedures? When you ask people to do things, it's important to explain why.

Show & Tell

After providing orientation and training to a new worker on how to do a job the “safe” way, have the worker demonstrate the process for you. Ask him or her to verbally explain the safety aspects of the process and why it's important to follow these steps at all times. Do this with existing workers as well or at least take the time to periodically observe and evaluate their established work habits. What value exists in avoiding any loose clothing when working a lathe? How about the value of following lock out tag out procedures when performing maintenance on a conveyor system? What is the benefit of having a competent person check the atmosphere in a confined space before entering? It should be clearly emphasized that safety rules and methodologies exist to help reduce the likelihood of physical harm to the workers.

Folks Need Strokes

Provide feedback to your employees - not just when they do the wrong things, but also when you see them doing the correct things, such as using fall protection systems, wearing the appropriate respiratory protection when spray painting, wearing their hard hats, and wearing safety glasses. Catch them doing things right! This is a great way to build up the worker's self esteem and to reinforce positive safety values. When co-workers overhear your praise, the safe work behavior will, hopefully, rub off on them too.

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Accidents Are Costly

Do your workers realize that by doing their part in following the company's safety rules and procedures on a consistent basis, they are contributing to the financial benefit of themselves as well as the company? The elimination of, or at least the reduction of, unsafe acts and conditions reduces the likelihood of expensive OSHA citations. Fewer and less severe accidents result in lower insurance costs. Also, the "hidden" or uninsured costs of accidents are not incurred if the accidents are prevented (investigation time, replacement worker training, uninsured equipment repairs, business interruption costs, etc.). These factors can influence the profit or loss picture of the company. A profitable company is a happy company, which normally translates into greater job stability.

Behavior is Contagious

Now it's time for a reality check. Unfortunately, with some employees, no matter how hard and how often you try to communicate the value of making the right "safety" choices in their jobs, they just don't get it! Chances are these folks also have performance problems concerning productivity or work quality and maybe have an attendance problem as well. It may be time to replace them as a last resort - but be sure to go through the appropriate channels to avoid litigation or union problems. Keeping such people around can "spoil the other apples in the barrel."

Walk the Talk

As a supervisor, you cannot afford to initiate a practice of "do what I say, not what I do" and then expect your subordinates to believe that you sincerely place value on the company's safety policies and procedures. How far do you get when you tell your children to wear their seat belts, but you do not? What about advising them not to smoke, but you do? You must lead by example and be consistent about it. Wear that hard hat and those safety glasses. Conduct those safety meetings with enthusiasm and encourage participation. Listen to your employees' ideas and be sure to provide them with feedback for each idea provided. Document those job site inspections and follow-up to ensure that corrective action has occurred to your satisfaction.

Your day-to-day activities and methods of conducting business say a lot to your subordinates. If you consistently demonstrate that you value your own safety and the safety of your employees, then those values are likely to be adopted by others. Safety will become an integral part of the production process rather than a separate activity to be done "if and when there is time" to do so. If you incorporate the value of safety into the job, and sell this to your workers, the benefits will follow in terms of decreased accident experience, improved morale, greater productivity, lower insurance costs and increased profitability. ***Now that's VALUE!***