

ENFORCEMENT: A KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL SAFETY PROGRAM

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We are all creatures of habit. In fact, we learn bad habits three times faster than good habits. That is simply because they are easier and/or more enjoyable. Once learned, a habit becomes automatic and is extremely difficult to break. Habits become a part of our behavior and are repeated over and over again.

When I conduct an Accident Investigation, I always ask this question:

- Has the employee done this act before, and if so, how often.

Unfortunately the answer is usually yes. Employees put themselves at risk each time they perform a task unsafely. The more often they perform the task unsafely, the more likely they are to being injured. It is not a matter of if, it is a matter of when and how serious.

I know that enforcing Safety Policy is not always easy. No one wants to be seen as mean or heavy handed. It also takes time and there is always the paperwork involved, and then I hear, "He is my best employee". I have heard countless excuses for why safety rules are not enforced, but when I am conducting a serious accident investigation, none of these seem to help.

Employees will do what we want them to do, if we want them to do it badly enough. Employees will adjust their behavior to what we hold important. If safety isn't important to us, it will not be important to our employees. Safety is a learned behavior; therefore, it must be taught and reinforced.

I believe we need to:

- Set high standards for employees safety behavior and hold employees accountable
- Safe work rules need to be established and communicated to all employees
- Training needs to be conducted for new employees and annual refresher training conducted
- Supervisors need to be accountable for conducting regular employee safety observations
- Unsafe conditions must be corrected as soon as possible
- A safety culture needs to be established that clearly reflects management's commitment to employee safety and well being

The above items will go a long way in reducing unsafe work behavior. However, there also has to be an established program to enforce safe work practices. This should be a two part process. The first part should always be Positive Counseling. The second part is the process of applying disciplinary action that could lead to dismissal.

I believe that Positive Counseling applied correctly can have a dramatic result.

- Positive Counseling is a method of identifying the cause or causes of employee unsafe behavior

Most employees do not do things that would deliberately cause them to be injured. They often, however, fail to see the importance of safe work behavior and are influenced by other factors. Listen to what the employee has to say carefully, and then help them to eliminate these reasons.

Positive Counseling will work most of the time, but not always. In those cases, employees need to be brought in and Corrective Action taken. Ensure the following when this is necessary:

- Address the unsafe behavior
- Be specific as to what occurred
- Explain the Safe Procedure
- Gain employee acknowledgement of the violation
- Spell out the consequences of continued unsafe behavior
- Document the meeting
- Follow-up with the employee in a positive manner to ensure the unsafe behavior has been corrected
- If the unsafe behavior is not corrected, then repeat the process until the behavior is correct or until the employment agreement has been terminated

Most employees do not want to be terminated and therefore, most will change their behavior. Also, remember that is much better to address the behavior and change it before a serious accident. It is the right thing to do.

If you have any safety related questions, or need help with your safety program, please give me a call at 1-800-356-1274.