



How to Build a Safety Program

By Creating a Culture of Safety



Create a Culture of Safety

“Every day in America, **13 people go to work and never come home.**

Every year in America, nearly **4 million people suffer a workplace injury** from which some may never recover. These are preventable tragedies that disable our workers, devastate our families, and damage our economy. American workers are not looking for a handout or a free lunch. They are looking for a good day’s pay for a hard day’s work.”

—Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis (2012)

Once upon a time, most businesses had safety plans that followed two steps:

STEP 1: Hope someone with a loud voice will shout “FIRE!” before the flames get too high

STEP 2: Have clearly-marked exits for employees to run to

(The second step was optional.)

As time passed and—to put it bluntly—far too many workers were maimed and killed, a third step became common. The new step involved posting written policies in employee break rooms. This step was rooted in the hope that we could scare employees into being safe.

The ubiquitous “X Days Since Our Last Accident” sign served to warn workers and chastise those who dared to get injured.



But can you imagine a sign like that on an amusement park ride? Or a city bus? Or an airplane? There would have to be a LOT of days written before people would be willing to get on and ride without feeling at least a little concerned for their safety.

So why should an assembly line worker...or a carpenter ...or any other worker, for that matter, feel any different?

If you are a safety manager, you are responsible for building a **culture of safety** at your place of employment. This means that you have to keep up with ever-evolving industry standards and procedures. It also means you have to create and implement programs that are unique to the people you work with and the type of business you conduct. You have to know federal and state regulations and scale them into a [customized, tailor-made plan](#).

But the good news is this: You aren’t alone. Every US industry is embracing a culture of safety. Although the specifics of building a safety program will vary from

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business to business, there are benchmarks that always apply. In this white paper, we'll take a look at these general principles, so you have an idea where to begin.

History of Workplace Safety

American industry developed with little regard for worker safety. The emphasis was on production, and to call safety an afterthought is being generous. As railroads crisscrossed the land and coal mines burrowed into it, the death toll among workers (who were considered expendable) was staggering.

Toward the end of the 19th century, unions and insurance companies were standing up for workers. In 1893, Congress passed the Safety Appliance Act, which required safer equipment on railroads. It was the first federal law aimed at improving workplace safety.

Well into the 20th century, however, many jobs in America were considered inherently dangerous. Everyone who worked in mining or utility line maintenance, for example, accepted that a certain (high) level of risk came with the job. Change was slow in coming, but by the 1970s workplace injury and death were seen as preventable. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration was created in 1971, establishing standards for occupations such as those involving trenching and machine guarding and those that involved hazardous materials such as asbestos, benzene, lead and pathogens.

The number of workers killed on the job has fallen from approximately 14,000 in 1970 to 4,340 in 2009. And this dramatic decrease came during a period when overall employment doubled to more than 130 million workers. During this same four-decade span, the rate of reported injuries and illnesses declined from 11 per 100 workers to 3.6 per 100 workers.



EHS as a Profession

In the early years of OSHA regulations, larger companies usually tasked someone—often an unwitting HR person or a previously injured employee—with handling compliance. Thus the “X Days Since Our Last Accident” sign was born. But the role of safety manager has evolved from one involving a few administrative duties to one responsible for coordinating many aspects of an industry’s culture.

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Forward-looking industries are employing Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) professionals to handle all of the following (and more):

- Motivating employees
- Ensuring compliance
- Obtaining required safety products and equipment
- Handling administrative tasks
- Conducting internal audits
- Improving employee training and education
- Meeting upper management's safety goals

Inspiring Workers

Modern safety managers do more than organize an office pizza party to celebrate a certain number of accident-free days. And they don't issue a disciplinary action each time a worker does something wrong. Safety managers figured out a long time ago that the rewards/punishment approach tends to encourage workers to do the right thing when they think they're being watched—not necessarily all the time.

Today's EHS managers are changing worker behavior by coaching employees and teaching safety leadership skills, so that employees can make safe choices on their own. The culture of safety establishes expected patterns of behavior. Managers don't just threaten employees. Instead, bosses and co-workers are empowered to reward one another when something is done the right way. And you, the safety manager, are the one who makes it possible.

“Effective safety management systems are **woven into the fabric of an organization**, becoming part of the culture, the way that people do their jobs.”

—National Safety Council website (2013)

Building Your Program

To build your culture of safety, you'll with written safety programs or plans. Which kind you create will depend on your industry, but common programs include:

- Fall protection
- Hearing, respiratory, and/or vision protection
- General accident prevention
- Personal protective equipment
- Hazardous material handling

Common components of workplace safety plans include:

- Risk assessment and consultation
- Safeguarding (machines or processes)
- Employee competency training
- Document retention
- Change management
- Technology solutions
- Safety committees
- Return-to-work procedures following incidents
- Incident investigation and reporting
- Inspections

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Start with clear objectives to give your company a blueprint for your new safety program. Make sure everyone in the company is on board; from management right down to each and every employee, successful implementation depends on total participation.

How will employees get their training?

Sometimes having a coach watching every step along the way can be an effective way to keep your employees motivated. Traditional on-site EHS “coaches” can customize a program to meet the needs of your business and its departments. Another benefit of the classroom approach is that workers not familiar with technology may be more comfortable learning in a face-to-face environment. You can get on-site training at your place of business or workers may have to travel to a training center. Either way, class size and duration should be flexible, so you can minimize production downtime.

Online training programs are popular because they reduce training time, they allow each worker to train according to his or her schedule, they’re more interesting than a lecture/slideshow method, and they cost less than traditional classroom training environments. That said, computer-based training must be accessible to your workers. Many workers may not have experience with computers, so basic technology skills would have to be an up-front part of training.

“Online training is a real cost saver. It **saves the expense of deploying trainers** to other locations and removing workers from production in order to take a course. You get consistent training across the board. You can record students test scores from the course and it is stored in a Learning Management System. Online training can keep you in compliance with OSHA regulations. Online training as part of an effective training program may reduce injuries and incidents related to equipment and facilities.”

—F. Marie Athey, Director Of EHS Product Management
at 360training.com

As everyone goes through training, make sure they know who to approach with questions and ideas. Your [online OSHA/EHS training](#) will be directed by instructors who are there to help. A comprehensive training solution for your organization will include an integrated, single sign-on solution for managing learning and content across your entire organization. The courses might come as “pay-per-view” online modules or they might be custom packaged for you in a hosted virtual university and flexible [learning management system \(LMS\)](#).

Make sure your workers complete this training in an environment that is free from distractions. They should be comfortable and not feel rushed to get back to their regular duties. Safety training is a crucial part of their regular duties, and it’s your responsibility to make sure it’s done thoroughly and effectively.

Finally, be sure to get feedback from your workers. Their input will help fine-tune the program and continue to improve your culture of safety.

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More than **4,500 U.S. workers die** on the job every year. More than 4.1 million workers suffer a serious job-related injury or illness.

(source:OSHA)

Obstacles You Will Face

We already discussed the old-school way of thinking that puts productivity ahead of safety. This mindset is alive and well, and your job will be to overcome it. You will inevitably encounter supervisors with the following attitude:

Workers should be watching out for their own safety anyway, right? Why do we have to babysit them?

This mindset will be an ongoing challenge. The truth is this: In these days of worker's compensation and civil lawsuits, your business must be able to demonstrate that specific actions were taken minimize risks. And since it's the mid-level supervisors who often are responsible for instituting the culture of safety, it's of utmost importance to ensure they're doing it correctly.

And why is it so important? Take a look at the costs of an ineffective safety program:

- OSHA fines
- Hospital and other medical bills
- Worker compensation benefits
- Loss of experienced workers
- Production downtime
- Increased insurance rates
- Potential lawsuits
- Damage to the business's reputation
- Loss of employee morale if they don't feel safe

Of course, the worst possible scenario is a workplace fatality. There will never be anything worse in your professional career than informing a family that their loved one has died.

Incentivise Success

Everyone appreciates a pat on the back for a job well done. There's no arguing that most workers look forward to that pizza party celebrating an injury-free track record. And safety recognition—that is, placing an emphasis on rewarding safe behavior over punishing unsafe behavior—has been demonstrated to cut injury rates in half.

But OSHA actually cautions against incentive programs that reward employees when they meet safety goals. Why?

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Officials say that “negative reinforcement” (for example, awarding bonuses for driving down DART rates) in effect discourages workers from reporting an incident. OSHA revised its policies in 2011 to encourage programs that promote reporting and discourage numbers-driven incentive programs.

“The review of incentive programs must focus on ensuring that any incentive programs in operation are not based solely on providing awards to employees for the reduction or absence of safety or health incidents. Instead, these programs should be innovative, positive, and **promote safety awareness and employee participation** in safety-related activities. The onsite evaluation will focus on the incentive program’s potential impact on the accuracy of reporting, injury and illnesses data.”

—*Voluntary Protection Programs (VPP): Policies and Procedures Manual. OSHA Directive (2008).*

EHS professionals now say incentive programs have to be incorporated into the larger culture of safety. The reward has to come not when 100 days without an injury happens; it has to come when someone submits a proposal to make a process safer. Or when someone completes a regular training initiative (such as watching a video or taking a test).

Rewards also shouldn’t take the place of the other components of your plan. Safety committees, specific training programs, return-to-work procedures following incidents and methodical incident investigation are all elements of a

balanced plan. Any reward has to be part of a larger system that measures and recognizes your people for safety engagement, raises safety awareness, reduces incidents and ensures accurate reporting when incidents happen.

OSHA Resources

OSHA’s national, regional and local outreach efforts include cooperative programs with businesses like yours.

Voluntary Protection Programs (VPPs) recognize model work environments that promote safety and health. VPPs bring management, labor and OSHA liaisons together to establish comprehensive safety and health management systems. Admission into the program is OSHA’s official recognition of outstanding EHS programs and can earn your business exemption from inspections.

Why wait for an inspection? OSHA can help you build your business’s safety program. Companies with up to 250 workers can take advantage of a free OSHA consultation service. Every OSHA area office employs a compliance assistance specialist who offers training and recommendations and who is completely removed from enforcement. A simple phone call is all it takes to get started, and any violations found aren’t reported to the federal office unless your company refuses to fix them. Contact your [OSHA regional office](#) for details.

There’s another national OSHA initiative you need to know about. This one pertains to record-keeping and reporting of occupational illnesses and injuries.

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A 2009 General Accounting Office (GAO) report found that businesses tend to underreport injuries and illnesses. In response, OSHA launched a recordkeeping initiative designed to examine the accuracy of these reports. The initiative is designed to keep the spotlight on selected industries that have high injury and illness rates.

“Accurate and honest **recordkeeping is vitally important** to workers’ health and safety.

...it is an important tool employers and workers can use to identify health and safety problems in their workplaces.”

—acting Assistant Secretary of Labor for OSHA

Jordan Barab (2009)

On Jan. 8, 2013, OSHA announced that 1,260 randomly-selected workplaces will be inspected as part of its Site-Specific Targeting (SST) Program. SST-12, as it is also known, is OSHA’s inspection initiative for high-hazard, non-construction work-places with 20 or more workers. SST-12 will focus regulatory enforcement on businesses with high rates of illness and injury, specifically:

- “Days away, restricted, or transferred” (DART) rate of seven out of 100 employees (in manufacturing industries)
- “Days away from work injury and illness” (DAWII) rate of five out of 100 employees (in manufacturing industries)
- DART rate of 15 out of 100 employees (in non-manufacturing industries)
- DAWII rate of 14 out of 100 employees (in non-manufacturing industries)



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American businesses have come a long way in reducing worksite injuries and fatalities. But there are still uncertainties at individual businesses about the best way to create a culture of safety. These uncertainties are the result of [ever-changing federal and state regulations](#) and of the vast differences between businesses and industries. Safety managers must also overcome a traditional “every man for himself” mindset that assumes common sense is enough to prevent injuries.

OSHA is stepping up its enforcement measures, but it is also reaching out to EHS managers to help them create and implement company programs. On-demand training courses designed by authoritative experts are also available online. These immediate and cost-effective educational solutions can improve your safety, compliance and risk management initiatives by providing HAZWOPER, Environmental, Construction, General Industry and OSHA Outreach training.

“Through the SST program, we can **prevent injuries and illnesses, and save lives**

by focusing our inspection resources on employers in high-hazard worksites where workers are at greater risk.”

—Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health David Michaels (2013)

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