

ACHIEVING SAFETY EXCELLENCE

HERE'S WHAT FIVE SCRAP RECYCLERS HAVE LEARNED FROM ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING THEIR AWARD-WINNING SAFETY PROGRAMS.

BY JONATHAN V.L. KISER

What does it take to achieve ongoing safety excellence in the scrap industry? In this article, five recyclers with successful safety programs share their experiences and outline key aspects of safety excellence, providing some real stories behind the safety headlines.

For background, each of these firms is a scrap metal processor with at least 35 employees, and each has achieved safety excellence high enough to be recognized by state agencies, the media, and/or other organizations. In particular, these firms have gone significant periods of time with no lost-time accidents. Their stories point to a combination of factors

that help ensure ongoing workplace safety, despite the inherent dangers in scrap operations.

COMMITMENT AND CONSISTENCY

What, then, are some key elements of successful safety programs?

A critical foundation is that company management must make a resolute commitment to a safe workplace. "Where you have a commitment to a safe workplace, you end up with a safe workplace," says John Gilstrap, ISRI's director of safety.

At root, management commitment means making safety a corporate priority. As Gilstrap explains, "Management must recognize that safety concerns

have an equal place at the table with profitability, quality, customer service, and all the other more traditional business focuses. Establishing the proper safety philosophy will enable workers to more readily adhere to proper safety procedures. It's a matter of capturing the hearts and minds of managers and inspiring them to spread the safety culture to individual workers."

For Sam Hummelstein, president and treasurer of Hummelstein Iron & Metal Inc. (Jonesboro, Ark.), safety has been a corporate focus dating back to his grandfather's days. "If there was a safety problem or an issue that could turn into a safety problem," he says, "you fixed it yesterday."

Based on his experience, the views, attitudes, and beliefs of company leaders are what determine the organization's priorities and culture—including safety. As Hummelstein notes, "If you delegate safety to someone or give it lip service, that diminishes the chance of

"If you delegate safety to someone or give it lip service, that diminishes the chance of employees understanding that it's really important."

—SAM HUMMELSTEIN

employees understanding that it's really important." Practicing what he preaches, he has taken ownership of this issue by personally serving as the firm's safety committee chair for more than five years. His commitment—and the company's overall dedication to safety—enabled it to reach 200,000 man-hours without a lost-time accident in 2003, earning it a Gold Commendation Safety Award from Wausau Insurance Cos. (Wausau, Wis.).

Similarly, PSC Metals Inc. (Cleveland)—which surpassed a million work hours without an accident at its Nashville plant—credits its safety accomplishments to the "very serious and real commitment to safety from upper management and the fact that everyone, including managers, supervisors, and hourly employees, got on the same page with safety and stayed there," says Dennis Stropko, PSC's manager of safety, health, and environmental.

Universal Scrap Metals Inc. (Chicago) also knows the importance and benefits of committing to safety. Last fall, Wausau Insurance recognized the recycler for completing 500,300 work hours without a lost workday accident. In the past five years, Universal has focused its safety efforts on improving worker attitudes, holding better safety meetings, upgrading equipment, and making safety its number-one daily priority.

In addition to committing to safety, management must be consistent in

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sticking to the safety rules and applying them up and down the ranks. "When we institute a policy—whether it has to do with safety shoes, gloves, glasses, ear plugs, or hard hats—everyone participates, including management," notes Phil Zeid, president and CEO of Universal Scrap Metals.

As many scrap veterans will attest, you can't persuade employees to wear their safety equipment or abide by safety rules if the boss doesn't do it. Employees must see that safety starts at the top and is practiced—and enforced—all the way down the line.

CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATIONS

Effective safety programs are also based on constant communication with employees through monthly safety meetings and safety training programs.

In many scrap firms, safety meetings are run by formal health and safety committees that include top

company management and production personnel, though some companies—especially small businesses—have achieved success with a less formal structure. Such committees can focus on a wide variety of topics, including near misses and recordable incidents, brainstorming and problem solving, writing safety programs, and conducting training sessions or other meetings.

"The safety committee is a better way of communicating," says Shaun Baker, safety director for Assad Iron & Metals Inc. (Brownsville, Pa.), which has been recognized for its safety efforts by the Western Pennsylvania Safety Council. "One worker may be hesitant to step forward, but when you have a member on the safety committee, he speaks for everybody."

Safety meetings at Hummelstein Iron & Metal focus on issues that are "relevant to what employees do on the job and try to get them to apply what they learn on the job at home as well,"

says Sam Hummelstein.

In addition to monthly meetings, some companies have more frequent gatherings to discuss safety issues. For example, PSC Metals holds "tool box" meetings every Monday morning. These brief meetings cover whatever topic the supervisor of that department deems appropriate and are often complemented by training sessions that teach employees how to comply with various OSHA regulations (such as bloodborne pathogens, hazardous materials, hazard communication, and so on).

OmniSource Corp. (Fort Wayne, Ind.) believes it received an Indiana Chamber of Commerce safety award in 2001 because of the specialized safety training it offers to workers on how to work smartly and safely. "We do extensive training on how to operate all our equipment, including our Bobcats, forklifts, and cranes," notes Jeff Wilke, corporate EHS director and DOT compliance director. The com-

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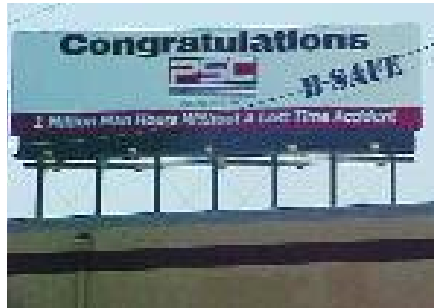
pany also has a staff trainer who concentrates on safe equipment operation.

Other OmniSource efforts include translating its safety programs into Spanish and using a bilingual worker to help other Spanish-speaking employees understand both safety and business issues. "With safety being such a strong part of the workforce, communications are key," Wilke states.

These and other safety efforts helped OmniSource become the first scrap processor in the United States to receive OSHA's Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) Star Certification. "With VPP," Wilke says, "you have to exceed the OSHA standards and have employees actively involved in your safety programs."

INCENTIVES FOR SUCCESS

Many scrap firms have found safety success using a variety of employee incentive programs to encourage safe



PSC Metals Inc. posted this billboard in Nashville to recognize the safety achievements of workers in its Nashville operation.

practices. Hummelstein Iron & Metal, for instance, has a gainsharing program for individual employees. This bonus is calculated weekly based on factors such as productivity, product quality, safety violations, and accidents. The company also has a year-end bonus based on profitability and an award for employees with no lost-time accidents that year.

"Most years everyone gets a gift,"

Hummelstein points out. "We've done really nice jackets, tool kits, and most recently gave everybody a home safety kit."

At PSC Metals, the safety incentive program includes:

- a bingo game in which a number is drawn every day there is no recordable incident. Employees can win seven games paying \$50 to \$150 in store gift cards;
- an employee safety slogan contest in which the winner can receive a \$200 PSC jacket; and
- jackets for employees who identify and solve a safety problem.

When PSC's Nashville plant achieved its million work-hour milestone, the company treated employees to a steak dinner and gave them jackets, hats, and a \$50 gift card, says Jim Sarto, safety coordinator. As an extra recognition, the firm posted a billboard ad along Interstate 40 West in Nashville congratulating the workers

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on their safety achievement.

At Universal Scrap Metals, any company department that works a full month without a lost-time accident is treated to lunch. The company is also looking at giving managers a financial incentive to achieve targeted safety goals, though a good pat on the back and thanking people goes a long way, company officials note.

KEEPING IT CLEAN

Good housekeeping is another common element in successful safety programs. "If the place is not neat and orderly, you can't have a safe place to work, period," Sam Hummelstein states.

That's a lesson learned well by Universal Scrap Metals, where poor housekeeping used to cause slips, trips, and falls. Today, housekeeping is king in terms of worker safety, says Phil Zeid. That means having clean, open work areas and aisles that are open, well marked, and well lit.

While safer operations may be the principal benefit of good housekeeping, there are other benefits as well. As ISRI's John Gilstrap notes, "If you have a safe workplace, that means you have a clean workplace. And when you have a clean workplace, you have an efficient workplace."

LOOKING FOR PROBLEMS

When trying to establish a good safety program or improve current safety practices, companies should go looking for problems—by conducting regular inspections of plant operations.

"We have a walk-through audit once a month at PSC Metals and take supervisors with us," says Jim Sarto. "It's better to have six pairs of eyes than just one in finding things, and we correct any problems right away."

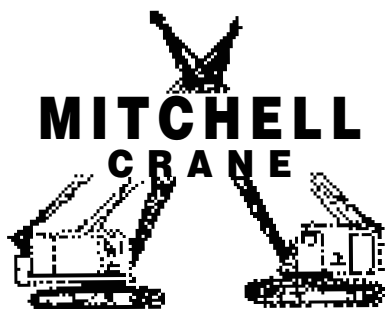
The monthly inspection program at Assad Iron & Metals involves a plant walk-through that examines fire extinguishers, mobile equipment, forklift

backup alarms and lights, and guards on conveyor belts. The inspectors also seek safety feedback from workers and make certain that all employees are using the appropriate personal protective equipment.

Hummelstein Iron & Metal conducts daily, weekly, and monthly facility inspections, looking for potential problems such as broken conduits, damage to electrical equipment extension cords, whether mobile equipment is being properly used and stored, and whether torches are fitted with the correct type of flashback arrestors.

"We make sure those inspections are being done properly," Sam Hummelstein says, noting that "where there's a problem, we go back and retrain."

The company also photographs any problems, then discusses the problems at its regular safety meetings. Supervisors must also fill out a complete report on all such safety violations and how the situations were corrected.



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ISRI EXPANDS ITS SAFETY SERVICES

In addition to its ongoing safety resources such as newsletters, videos, and posters, ISRI is embarking on an aggressive safety outreach campaign in 2005. Efforts include:

- a 10-hour **OSHA training program** that focuses on employee safety and health basics. This certification program—essentially an Industrial Safety 101 course—is offered free to ISRI members and will be led by John Gilstrap, ISRI's director of safety;
- **ISRI Safety Consulting Services**, a program that brings safety consultants directly to member sites to assess hazards and recommend solutions to safety problems. This fee-for-service program enables ISRI members to get an expert, on-site safety review at a fraction of the cost of hiring consultants on their own; and
- a "**compliance road show**" available to all ISRI chapters. At these free briefings, ISRI staff will address relevant industry issues from the perspectives of safety, environmental compliance, and the law. Members will then discuss how they dealt with such issues and should learn from each other's experiences, says Gilstrap.

"The goal," he notes, "is to make compliance issues relevant to our membership and to demonstrate how compliance is closely tied to all of a member's business decisions."

For more information on ISRI's safety programs and resources, contact Anne Marie Horvath at 202/662-8511 or annemariehorvath@isri.org.



At OmniSource, inspections and the corrective actions that followed similar self-audits helped the company establish an excellent program concerning lead exposure and the proper use of respirators.

THIRD-PARTY FEEDBACK

Some companies with good safety programs have found it helpful to seek advice from third-party sources, such as insurance carriers, regulatory agencies, and independent consultants.

At Hummelstein Iron & Metal, for instance, representatives from Wausau Insurance have performed inspections and attended company safety meetings. "They critique, review, suggest solutions to problems, and are a great resource," says Sam Hummelstein. "We interact with them by e-mail or mail every few weeks." The firm also relies on input from an Arkansas Department of Labor safety consultant to develop and review its safety program.

Likewise, Universal Scrap Metals enjoys a good working relationship with both its insurance carrier and a clinic it uses for first-aid needs. The clinic understands Universal's business and can best determine when its employees are ready to return to work after an injury, says Phil Zeid. In addition,

Chicago's environmental and safety department conducts monthly audits at Universal, and the city's fire department walks through the facility twice a year.

KEEP LOOKING, KEEP IMPROVING

Though the companies in this article all have award-winning safety programs, they also realize that there's always room for improvement. For example, Shaun Baker wants to train Assad Iron & Metals employees on the proper way to load scrap into trucks—in part because a poorly loaded company truck once tipped over while going around a bend.

At OmniSource, creating its own safety videos enhances its safety efforts by capturing scenes of the employees' actual working conditions, Jeff Wilke notes.

Universal Scrap Metals always seeks ways to improve conditions on its plant floor. For instance, the firm will replace worn concrete in some areas and put a grid on it so it isn't slippery if it does get wet, says Phil Zeid. The company is also looking into ways to reduce manual handling through more automated scrap management approaches.

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Conversely, replacing an injured employee costs "anywhere from \$2,000 to \$10,000 a year," estimates Sam Hummelstein. Plus, a serious injury will affect everything you do, especially at a small business. "You're going to be focused on it, not doing other productive stuff," he says. "Your stress level goes up, and your life is shortened."

In the end, companies with successful safety programs know that safety is an ongoing process, not a destination, and that their safety achievements are noteworthy landmarks on the never-ending road to safety excellence. ■

Jonathan V.L. Kiser is a Harrisonburg, Va.-based environmental consultant, specializing in recycling, waste management, and program cost assessments.

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