

### Basic Components of an Effective Safety Program

Developing an effective safety program from scratch—or evaluating an existing one—can feel overwhelming. However, there are a number of basic principles that can help you integrate safety into your daily business operations and make it a critical element of your organization's culture.

#### 1) Commit to Safety

The support of top management is a critical element in developing a comprehensive approach to safety. "Management commitment and employee involvement" lead federal OSHA's short list of the basic elements required for an effective safety and health program. (The other components—analyzing the worksite for hazards; hazard prevention and control; and training—discussed below.) At its core, an effective safety program is built on the belief that employee safety is a top priority. That basic value is then supported by a clearly defined strategy that includes goals, objectives, two-way communication and evaluation of progress.

OSHA emphasizes that employees' attitudes toward safety are linked to that of management. "It is essential that you demonstrate at all times your personal concern for employee safety and health, and the priority you place on them in your workplace," states the OSHA Small Business Handbook. "Your policy must be clear. Only you can show its importance through your own actions." How can you show your commitment? Create a written safety policy that expresses your company's philosophy. Establish specific goals and communicate them throughout the organization. Assign responsibility for safety: In addition to specific supervisory duties, create an expectation that all employees will be responsible for working safely and will be held accountable for doing so. Give serious consideration to the selection of a safety coordinator who will have (or will acquire) specialized knowledge needed to support the program. Above all, involve your employees in planning and carrying out your efforts. Serious attempts to include employees in identifying and resolving safety and health problems will cement their buy-in and provide you with the benefit of their "hands-on" insights.

#### 2) Identify Hazards

In addition to management commitment and employee involvement, OSHA recommends analyzing your worksite to identify existing and potential hazards. This is not a one-time activity. Worksite analysis contains a number of practices involving people, equipment and work processes, including:

- A review of facilities and work activities, designed to uncover current and potential hazards. This could include physical inspection of the workplace, an examination of your organization's injury history, and thorough analysis of the steps involved in any task.
- Re-assessing the potential for hazards any time changes are made to personnel, procedures or equipment.
- Periodic self-inspections to confirm that hazard controls are working and to evaluate any new hazards.
- Creating an environment that allows employees to report potential hazards without fear of negative repercussions.
- Thorough investigation if an incident occurs, in order to prevent it from occurring again. (OSHA exempts small businesses with ten or fewer employees from recordkeeping requirements. However, keeping records of injuries, illnesses, near-misses and property losses can help employers of any size make corrections to avoid similar incidents in the future.)

#### 3) Prevent and Control Hazards

The most effective way to control hazards is to eliminate them by making changes that improve equipment and work processes. For example, you might enclose or put guards on a machine's moving parts or improve ventilation and lighting. If engineering controls are not feasible, you should turn next to "administrative controls," actions that reduce exposure to a hazard either by changing work processes, or by scheduling shorter work times in hazard areas. Other control systems recommended by OSHA include:

- Setting up safe work procedures and making sure employees understand and follow them.
- Enforcing compliance with these procedures through a disciplinary system that is created with employee input.
- Supplying personal protective equipment (PPE) such as safety goggles, hard hats, respirators, etc., and ensuring

- that employees understand why they need the equipment, how to use it and how to maintain it.
- Providing for regular equipment maintenance.
- Creating an emergency plan that covers fires, natural disasters and any situation likely to occur in a given workplace.

As part of the plan, you should conduct frequent drills and establish relationships with nearby medical and emergency response teams.

#### **4) Train Employees, Supervisors and Managers**

All employees must be trained to understand every serious hazard they might be exposed to and how to protect themselves. Simply acquiring knowledge isn't enough, however. You must verify that employees really understood what was taught. Safety instruction for supervisors must help them understand the hazards that face employees. They must also learn to reinforce training with on-the-spot reminders, refresher sessions, and, if necessary, disciplinary action. Training for top management should ensure that they understand their safety and health responsibilities and know how to hold subordinate supervisors responsible for theirs. Training activities, as well as those of the three other program components, should be documented, both to meet legal requirements and to demonstrate good faith.