

# STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

March 2002

## Are You Promoting a Safe & Healthy Workplace? by Leslie Lord

### INTRODUCTION TO THE PROCESS OF SAFETY

Safety is everyone's business, but employers have a special responsibility to make sure that they are providing a safe workplace for their employees. Employers who want to stay in business must also be in the business of safety.

Planning for workplace safety and health is an important part of every business. It helps to reduce the costs and risks associated with occupational accidents. It must be a major management issue along with production, sales and quality control.

Unfortunately, the government's first reaction to an unsafe workplace is to regulate using a list of rigid "thou shall not..." rules. Fortunately, safety experts have helped the government realize that it cannot anticipate and regulate every workplace situation. Therefore, a new theory of safety management has emerged—let employers create their own unique set of workplace safety rules. The government would control the process by which employers formulated these rules, but it would be the responsibility of the employers to inform their employees about the rules.

By allowing employers to develop their own written safety program, they are more apt to identify hazards in their workplace and address the risks with a common sense approach tailored to their unique business situation. While no manual, for instance, can guarantee an accident-free workplace, the increased safety awareness generated by a manual helps to reduce accidents.

### SAFETY PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Currently, OSHA does not require employers to have an employee safety manual. But all employers must have an effective occupational safety and health plan or program including evidence in the following five areas:

- Management commitment
- Employee involvement
- Worksite analysis
- Hazard prevention and control
- Training

In this article we will focus on the first two areas. In subsequent articles we will focus separately on hazard prevention and control, as well as training.

In addition to the general federal rules, some specific industry standards and hazardous

communication standards require a written plan. Standards are specific rules—the dos and don'ts—the hard and fast requirements for operating machinery, equipment, etc. There are several states that have specific statutes, requiring employers to have written plans and employee safety committees.

**STATES REQUIRING EMPLOYERS TO HAVE WRITTEN PLANS**

Alaska, California, Hawaii, Minnesota, Nevada, Oregon & Washington

**STATES REQUIRING EMPLOYERS TO SET UP EMPLOYEE SAFETY COMMITTEES IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE WRITTEN PLAN**

California (Optional), Nevada, Oregon & Washington

**MANAGEMENT COMMITMENT**

Initially, your business should assign responsibility for safety to a single person within your company. This person will be the “responsible safety officer.” Decide who in your company will be given such responsibility and authority. In many cases, it will be an owner, but for some companies the plant manager or a ranking member of the management team is the one chosen to develop and set up the program.

Management's commitment to safety and health shows in every decision and action the company makes. The health and safety of employees must be the first priority. The success of a company's safety program will hinge not only on the individual the company selects to set up the program, but also on the company's full cooperation and support of the program.

**EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT**

When considering responsibility, remember to include all of your employees. Provide your workers with the proper training and the responsibility to follow the safety and health procedures. They must learn to recognize and report hazards in their immediate work areas. Safety contests and suggestion boxes are examples of direct incentives to ensure employee compliance and involvement.

Employees should also be informed of their responsibilities under current OSHA rules, which require every employee to comply with the occupational safety and health standards applicable to their own actions and conduct.

**WORKSITE INSPECTION AND ANALYSIS—WHAT'S INVOLVED**

Before creating your safety program, it is important to gather as much information about your current workplace and work practices as possible. The information that you gather can help

you identify workplace problems and determine the best possible method for solving them.

### **Conducting a Safety and Health Survey:**

First, conduct a comprehensive safety and health survey of your facility to identify existing or potential hazards. This survey should evaluate workplace conditions regarding:

- Safety and health regulations
- Generally recognized safe work practices
- Physical hazards or any hazardous materials
- Employee work habits
- Discussions of safety and health problems with employees

There are several specific things that you need to cover in your survey.

- **Equipment:** Make a list of your equipment and tools. Be sure to include their principal area of use. Pay particular attention to the inspection and maintenance schedules and activities. Also, assess the physical layout of your facility.
- **Chemicals:** Make a list of ALL the chemicals (even ones you think are nonissues) used in your workplace. Collect Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) on the materials used. Make sure you identify where they are used and possible employee exposure.
- **Work Practices:** Detail specific work practices associated with equipment, tools and chemicals used. Give extra attention to personal protection equipment, guarding, ventilation, emergency procedures and use of appropriate tools.
- **OSHA Rules:** Review all the rules applicable to your operation. Pay attention to the rules pertaining to equipment, process, materials and chemicals. Review the specific standards applying to “manufacturing” and “construction” as well. (Rules specific to Truss Manufacturers will be included in [WTCA's Web-Based Safety Management Program – See below.](#))
- **Prior Accident Assessment:** Evaluate your existing injury and illness prevention program to identify areas that may be working well and those that may need improvement. Look at your company's:
  - Accident, injury or illness dates
  - Workers' compensation costs
  - Rates of employee turnover or absenteeism
  - Company policies
  - Guidelines for proper work practices
  - Rules for work safety and health
  - Records of training programs
  - Other safety-related issues and programs

**Remember:** After you appoint a safety manager and delegate authority to manage a program, the ultimate responsibility for safety and health in your workplace still rests with you, the employer.

### **Physically Inspecting the Work-place for Hazards:**

Periodic inspections and procedures for correction and control provide methods of identifying existing or potential hazards and controlling or abating them.

The frequency of these inspections depends on:

- The operations involved
- The magnitude of hazards
- The proficiency of employees
- Changes in equipment or work process
- The history of workplace injuries and illnesses

Personnel who, through experience or training, are able to identify actual and potential hazards should conduct the inspections.

Establishing a safety and health program to prevent occupational injuries and illnesses is not only the right thing to do, it's the profitable thing to do. Studies have shown a \$4 to \$6 return for every dollar invested in safety and health.

A written inspection report should be completed and reviewed by management and/or your safety committee. The review process should prioritize actions and verify the completion of any previous corrective actions. The results of your inspection program should be used to identify positive and negative safety trends.

**Document your maintenance.** Workplace equipment and personal protective gear should be maintained in good, safe working condition. By monitoring and verifying your routine maintenance schedules you can not only prevent costly breakdowns, but also undue exposures to hazards.

**Document immediate corrections.** If you identify a hazard, it should be corrected immediately, or as soon as possible. For hazards that cannot be corrected immediately, make sure that you set a reasonable target date for completing the remedy. When setting a target date, consider the probability and severity of any injury or illness resulting from the hazard.

Provide interim protection for workers while the hazards are being corrected. In order to monitor the progress of any corrective action, consider a written tracking system or log.

### **Taking Corrective Action:**

- **Set Written Priorities:** Review and set priorities for your safety program based on the severity of the hazards anticipated in the workplace. Create a specific code of safe work practices and injury and illness prevention procedures that will be implemented and maintained by your company. This will be the backbone of your overall safety program. You may find that after reviewing all the facts, you are already well on your way to having an effective safety prevention program.
- **Develop an Action Plan:** An action plan is a specific, written description of problems and solutions. Make sure your plan is manageable and reasonable. It can and should be fluid and correspond with the changes in your workplace. A good action plan will have two parts:
  - An overall list of the major changes or improvements needed, labeling each with a priority and target date for completion.
  - A specific plan for making the identified changes, including the steps required, assigned responsibility and a timeline including a deadline for completion.

- **Taking Action:** Once you've identified the major changes, begin working on the highest priority item. You can work on more than one change at a time. Be aware that over time, priorities may change or others may be identified. Make sure that you open the lines of communication with your employees. It will be critical to a successful plan that they understand your safety program, why it is important to them, and how it affects their jobs and responsibilities. The more you communicate with your employees, the smoother the necessary changes will go.
  - **Follow Up:** Schedule a review, whether it is quarterly, semiannually or annually, to look at each of the critical components of your safety program. This will help to determine if your program is working well and identify any necessary changes. Any changes identified will be the basis of a new action plan to improve your safety program.
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## WTCA Is Developing a Customizable Safety Program

Employers have the obligation of providing their employees with a safe place to work. With that in mind, the Management Committee has directed WTCA to begin developing a safety manual specifically for component manufacturers. The purpose of this safety manual is to provide component manufacturers with the strategic building blocks to create a customizable safety program to fit any workplace situation. The finished product will be a system that allows manufacturers to publish safety manuals that are organized, easily updated, effective and cost-efficient.

The manual is currently in development, but the long-term plan is to create an online template that is accessible from WTCA's web site. This template will be divided into mandatory and industry specific "chapters." Each chapter will be divided into sections based on regulations and standards that can be edited to fit a company's needs. The text of this online manual will be based upon OSHA regulations and standards. Additionally, this online template will include various fact sheets, forms and checklists to supplement the safety manual.

Continue checking WTCA's web site and SBC Magazine for future updates on the progress of this new program. The target date to roll out this program is January 2003.

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If you would like more information on the issues raised in this article, please contact WTCA at 608/274-4849.

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