

Have a safe day

Year-end review of safety risks a good practice



David J.
DE VITA
Guest Columnist

A common goal among businesses across all industry segments is – or should be – to provide the safest work environment possible for employees, visitors and those in the general public who encounter their places of business.

Companies have both a legal and moral obligation to employees and their families to provide a safe workplace. Embracing safety is also a wise financial decision.

Businesses with employees properly trained in safety compliance will reduce their liability associated with accidents and injuries, as well as their direct costs (such as insurance premiums and rental fees) and indirect costs (such as administrative time, lost production and negative publicity). Approximately 10 percent of a claim or loss constitutes insured costs; the remaining uninsurable expenses come straight from a company's bottom line.

Common sense tells us that prevention is the most effective way to create a safe working environment. Consider this statistic: more than 80 percent of all accidents/incidents are related to an unsafe act by a worker, such as a poor decision, inattentiveness or complacency.

Obviously, safety risk factors vary from company to company, depending on the number of employees, locations and type of business. Identifying your company's specific risks and assessing the hazards are important first steps in establishing and/or ensuring an effective, long-term safety program.

Here, then, are nine steps to a safer 2008:

1) Premises safety. Regularly review your parking lot, sidewalks, building exteriors and interior space accessible to both employees and customers/vendors to ensure they are clean and clear of trip and fall hazards.

2) Employment screening. Establish hiring procedures to help reduce potential accidents and claims. Make filling out an employment application a requirement and always conduct in-person interviews. Require a current, valid driver's license and perform a department of motor vehicles check on all drivers. Implement pre-employment drug testing as well as ongoing random testing and post-accident testing.

3) Workplace injuries. Having a written, "early return to work" program helps reduce claims costs and employee time away from work should injury occur on the job. Be sure that all employees are oriented and trained in the ERTW program. Have a designated company physician or a clinic that knows and understands the type of work your employees are required to perform.

4) Protective equipment. To help reduce potential injuries to employees (and for legal reasons) enforce the use of personal protective equipment as dictated by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and company policy. Train employees on proper use, inspection and storage of required PPE and make them accountable for using it per the established policies and procedures.

5) Commitment to safety. Evaluate your leadership's commitment to safety: Are there procedures in place for accountability of safety at all levels (including ownership)? Is management committed to providing the resources necessary to cultivate a safe workplace environment (resources include time, money, tools and equipment)? Is management involved in the review of safety inspections completed regularly in the workplace?

6) Written safety program. A written safety program is essential to reducing

potential accidents and claims. Require all employees to be oriented on safety policies and procedures. Ask employees to sign a safety orientation acknowledgement form.

7) Top-of-mind awareness. Encourage employees to follow basic safety rules and accident prevention techniques. Safety must become part of the culture and fiber of your organization. Conduct new-employee safety training/orientation within the first week of employment and before workers are exposed to safety hazards. Hold job-specific safety training as appropriate. Document all safety meetings and training sessions.

8) Insurance/losses/claims management. Effective safety programs lead to reduced overhead insurance costs and claims. Track accidents that result in employee missed days from work. Investigate all near misses and accidents for their true causes. Utilize tracking data to make changes and adjustments in your safety efforts – take corrective action! Review first aid cases and insurance claims quarterly and annually for trends. You want to keep your Experience Modification Ratio less than 1.00.

9) Emergency preparedness. Have a written emergency preparedness program to ensure the safety of your workers, customers and the public. Formally designate an EPP team leader. Are all employees trained in a comprehensive emergency preparedness process (and is the training documented)? Is the necessary equipment purchased – and on the ready – in the event of an emergency?

Interested parties can find a comprehensive self-evaluation test free for the downloading on our Web site, www.csc-llc.net. Preventing problems may require a little extra time and effort, but the results – reducing injuries, saving lives and increasing your bottom-line profit – make it all worthwhile. Have a safe day! ☺

David De Vita is president of Greenville-based Carolina Safety Consultants, which provides training and consulting with specialized expertise in the construction, light manufacturing and health care industries. He can be reached at ddevita@csc-llc.net or 905-7835.