



The Importance of Building a Safety Culture

Of course workplace safety is important to you. But how important is it to your employees? If you don't know, it may be time to evaluate the safety culture at your business and think about what you can do to improve it.

What is a Safety Culture?

A safety culture is the shared beliefs, practices and mindsets that shape behavior at an organization in a positive way. A safety culture sets the standard for overall safety at your company.

Why Should I Implement a Safety Culture?

According to OSHA, an established safety culture can reduce your injury and illness costs by 20 to 40 percent. When it comes to the costs associated with safety, consider these statistics from OSHA:

- Employers pay almost \$1 billion per week for direct workers' compensation costs alone, which comes straight out of company profits.

- Injuries and illnesses increase workers' compensation and retraining costs.
- Lost productivity from injuries and illnesses costs companies roughly \$63 billion each year.

If you have high workers' compensation costs or your premium increases every year, analyzing the effectiveness of your company's safety culture is a good way to start controlling these costs.

How Can I Motivate My Employees to Care?

You can motivate your employees to care about safety by tying it directly to compensation or incentives. Reward employees who err on the side of safety over efficiency. But make sure you understand the difference between reward and recognition—you don't want employees doing something just because they know they'll get something tangible in return.

A strong safety culture with appropriate recognition and rewards will inspire employees to look out for one another.

Your company's safety culture is a direct reflection of the overall culture of your company and employees.

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and point out unsafe behaviors or situations. Everyone will feel responsible for safety and pursue it on a daily basis by going beyond the “call of duty” to identify unsafe conditions and behaviors, and to intervene to correct them.

Where Do I Start?

Use these strategies to develop a culture of safety:

- Develop a site safety vision including key policies, goals, measures, and strategic and operational plans.
- Implement a “buddy system” in which experienced individuals are paired up with newer workers. The experienced workers can serve as role models for newer workers and can demonstrate safe work procedures.
- Encourage all employees to watch out for others. In doing so, develop safety responsibilities for all levels of the organization.
- Align management and supervisors by establishing a shared vision of safety and health goals, and objectives versus production.
- Implement a process that holds management accountable for visibly being involved, setting the proper example, and leading a positive change for safety and health.
- Management should make themselves available during worker orientation and introduction sessions.
- The organization should demonstrate a commitment to employee health and safety by implementing safe work practices and prescribing the mentality that unsafe actions are not tolerated.
- Make health and safety part of workplace communications.
- Encourage workers to report health and safety concerns that they encounter and respond to their concerns in a timely fashion. Also provide multiple paths for employees to bring suggestions, concerns and problems forward.
- Develop a system for tracking and ensuring the timeliness of hazard corrections.
- Ensure that the organization has a system for reporting near-miss accidents, injuries and the need for first aid.
- Promote safety training sessions and host emergency response training.
- Maintain safety equipment and ensure that it is worn properly by employees.
- Revise incentives and disciplinary systems to accommodate safety and health concerns.