

Crew Training: Laying The Right Foundation

Looming job deadlines can lead employees to make changes in their work and ignore company safety rules. In the rush to complete a job on time, supervisors may not notice when employees take shortcuts.

Employees need to know the company's safety policies and procedures, and all workers should receive regular updates and reinforcement of work rules, hazard recognition and equipment selection. In fact, employee training is one of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) compliance issues; not offering it may result in citations.

To be effective, training should go beyond a standard lecture and include multiple channels, such as demonstrations, workshops and hands-on activities. Also, training must give workers the opportunity to apply what they learn as soon as possible to improve retention and implementation. Ensuring the message is not only heard, but also understood, is especially important with a multilingual workforce.

In many trades, supervisors prefer to use on-the-job training (OJT) to simultaneously deliver both a lecture and hands-on training. It is critical to entrust a qualified senior employee with OJT. When done properly, OJT is an all-encompassing strategy in which workers learn and retain important safety skills.

WHO SHOULD LEARN WHAT?

Management personnel should receive safety training to ensure proper implementation, enforcement and assessment of a company's plan. A foreman responsible for enforcing the safety program not only must know and follow the safety program, but also must make sure others follow the rules. A new supervisor needs help learning how to manage people, provide feedback



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and use discipline when appropriate.

Safety doesn't solely depend on the first-line supervisor. Middle managers also need tools to help them enforce a safety program and evaluate program implementation by their foremen and superintendents.

Assessment tools help gather information, but are useless if managers don't learn how to interpret the results. The key is measuring the things that result in reduced exposures and chances of accidents. For example, counting hardhat usage during inspections may help with compliance, but most likely won't affect the sources of injury. A more effective measurement is to track and categorize first-aid cases to identify changes to means and methods that will have a positive impact on exposures. Focusing solely on hardhat usage may prevent a company from finding the true cause of injuries, such as dust in the eyes or slips and trips from poor jobsite housekeeping.

Leading indicators, which differ from contractor to contractor, identify a negative change from expectations. Looking at the underlying cause of accidents allows management to take action in the form of policies, means or methods. For example, a sudden increase in rashes or burns from workers pouring concrete may suggest equipment placement problems or inappropriate use of safety glasses, boots or gloves.

Management needs to evaluate and develop the current safety program. Relying solely on accident reports is like driving a car using only the rear-view mirror. Management can evaluate indicators from nontraditional sources, such as productivity and quality, which indicate safety program implementation problems; for example, comparing manhours to the percent of materials installed or percent of completion. An investigation can reveal that a couple of lost-time accidents stemming from a formwork blowout resulted in hir-

ing replacement workers and rework of a concrete wall. Productivity is impacted both by the replacement workers who are not as productive as an experienced crew and the replacement of the damaged materials.

TYPES OF TRAINING

Traditional classroom training still has its place in an overall training plan. It allows a message to be delivered to a group of people, reducing the interpretative changes that occur when one person passes information to another. It also allows attendees to challenge and ask questions. This is an important part of training because objections and questions can underscore weaknesses in company policies and procedures. The drawbacks to classroom training are travel and pulling a large number of people away from the job. Because of these issues, provide at least a half-day of training to minimize the effect of travel time.

If classroom training is impractical or cost-prohibitive, a variety of computer-based training programs are available. While computer training delivers verbal and visual information concurrently, it eliminates the opportunity for discussion.

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When a question occurs, workers must use email, a telephone or some other method to convey feedback, and then may wait hours or days for a response. Also, some people don't feel comfortable using computers and may need an introductory lesson to learn the format and navigation. Positive aspects of computer training include the delivery of complex content at the worker's own pace and the ability to complete a ses-

sion over an extended period of time. No travel is required and training is available during downtime caused by weather delays or materials delivery issues.

Webinars combine classroom and computer-based training by delivering content to a large group of people who can immediately challenge the training and hear other attendees' views and concerns without traveling offsite. Attendee discussion can be a challenge, making webinars fine for an hour or so but not effective for long or consecutive sessions. However, this challenge may soon be eliminated as webinar providers have started introducing tools—such as polls and virtual breakout rooms—to better engage attendees.

Training goes beyond the compliance issues to improve a company's most valuable resource—its employees—resulting in a return on investment of improved productivity, safety and quality of operations.

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