

Safety check-up

Monitoring your organization's health online **Interviewed by Elizabeth Grace Saunders**

When was the last time you did a check-up on your safety check-ups? For most managers, just completing established risk control procedures takes all the energy they can muster.

"Many business people have constantly increasing responsibilities with new challenges and pushes for greater efficiency," says Mitchell Maddox, a risk control manager at Westfield Insurance. "In this environment, it's easy to accept the existing safety programs instead of taking time to step back, address issues and prioritize risk management opportunities."

Smart Business discussed with Maddox the benefits of using simple, electronic tools that offer quick, comprehensive risk control assessments.

How can assessments help businesses evaluate the effectiveness of safety and loss-control programs?

Simple assessments help company leaders evaluate safety and loss-control procedures from a 30,000-foot view, including whether existing programs still work effectively and efficiently. Regulatory changes, operational modifications, external factors and process improvement concerns could all lead to necessary revisions of safety programs.

Compiling feedback from line workers, managers and executives from a variety of departments can help create a 360-degree evaluation of the safety culture of an organization, which assists with planning and executing programs. Also, the results can help management understand whether they're communicating safety messages effectively.

How can an online tool make these assessments easier and more effective?

Most people don't want to take a long time to complete a safety assessment. Internet tools make it easy by allowing the participant to perform the assessment as it fits their schedule.

Web-based tools also have the benefit of privacy. No one is looking over the participant's shoulder. Managers can privately



Mitchell Maddox
Risk control manager
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review the results and decide what actions they want to take.

Can managers expect specific recommendations from a risk-control tool?

It's helpful to initially complete a safety assessment that has a streamlined, but comprehensive, format. Typically, assessments involve a series of questions designed to evaluate main risk-control areas. General assessments help business leaders think through the different components of their safety programs and decide what they need to address.

Tools vary in their exact terminology, but broad assessments usually address areas such as safety culture, management support and risk control. Safety culture covers issues such as employees' understanding of safety expectations and responsibilities. Management support covers questions like leaders' awareness of and response to safety gaps. Risk control may address issues such as the specificity of the safety plan and physical controls in place to prevent a loss.

Managers gain valuable knowledge from completing an assessment that takes a look at their company's overall programs. If they desire further detail for a particular

area, they can seek out other tools that address specific programs such as a lock-out/tagout program.

How can businesses use these recommendations to close safety and risk gaps?

Objective results can help business leaders take a step back and evaluate the strengths and opportunities within their organization. The most helpful tools not only point out areas for improvement, but also offer practical suggestions to enhance those areas. Business leaders can use this information to set priorities and drive the direction of their risk management programs. Their strategies can focus on first addressing areas of the greatest weakness or of the highest priority.

The tools themselves don't provide conclusive answers. Instead they heighten awareness, provide direction for targeted effort, and suggest possible actions to reach desired safety results.

What steps should business leaders take after receiving an assessment?

Once decision-makers have their results, they need to determine what they want to accomplish. Often, the most effective strategy is to focus on safety efforts that will drive high-priority business results. Improvements happen when there is leadership support for particular goals and action steps are built to achieve those goals. Along with a plan, managers should establish benchmarks to help them determine whether they're on track. If they don't meet their forecasted results, they can look back at their action plan and re-evaluate how to meet their short- and long-term goals.

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