

# Playing it safe to increase profit

Here's how you can teach supervisors to make safety part of your daily operations. **Interviewed by Elizabeth Grace Saunders**

**F**rom punching a hole to lifting a box, every employee action has an impact on the efficiency of production. Not only do workers need to act quickly and effectively, but they also need to perform functions safely.

"Most companies see safety programs as stand-alone programs," says Dave White, manager of risk services at Westfield Insurance. "But safety programs have as much to do with production as any other part of the process."

*Smart Business* spoke with White about the significance of integrating safety programs into manufacturing processes and facility cultures.

## Why are safety programs important?

Companies often believe that the main function of safety programs is to comply with OSHA federal and state regulations. But converting safety programs from manuals and videos and training sessions to integral parts of the production processes can greatly benefit businesses. When a stamping machine or any other piece of equipment goes down, it has a negative impact on production. In the same manner, an accident or injury slows production.

## How can safety programs improve the bottom line?

Insurance does not cover everything. Time spent attending to injured employees, investigating accidents, reworking schedules and possibly rehiring and retraining new employees eats into profit. Reducing accidents and injuries helps the bottom line by eliminating these costs. But most importantly, incidents that interrupt business also impact client satisfaction. And insurance can't guarantee clients will stay with you. If companies can't fulfill their customers' requests, they will lose them.

## How can companies determine which safety programs they need?

Many businesses begin with OSHA federal and state regulations. From there, supervisors should look at each step in their pro-



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duction processes, paying close attention to accidents, near-misses, wastes, material shortages and machine breakdowns. Supervisors and line workers should discuss the safest way to perform job functions.

However, the safety program is only as effective as the employees following it. All employees should receive hands-on training to perform their jobs safely and efficiently. Supervisors need to understand the facets of each job and train and retrain employees on a continual basis.

Throughout, employees should look for ways to reduce the number of times the product is touched by workers, through increased mechanization or increased requirements for suppliers' materials. Each process improvement increases safety and profits in a facility, and practicing safe procedures should be part of daily operations.

## How should these programs be documented and communicated?

Supervisors and foremen have to communicate safety procedures all the time. Just as supervisors automatically correct employees who create waste, they need to continually correct workers who act unsafely. Employees need to hear the message that if they perform an operation safely the first time, they won't need to perform

it a second time.

Many companies conduct training sessions by showing a video and expecting employees to follow the procedures. For optimal effectiveness, supervisors and workers should document necessary steps while actually operating machinery. This should be followed by analysis to determine if any steps can be safely removed.

Once supervisors have determined the appropriate and necessary steps and procedures, they should train operators utilizing these best practices. This should include demonstrating the job, having the operators perform the function and demonstrating again with follow-up afterward. To increase motivation and adherence, safety programs should factor into supervisors' performance reviews and merit increases.

## How can businesses measure the effectiveness and efficiency of their safety programs?

Companies should have safety programs seamlessly blended into their business plans and cultures. The results of having well-run, integrated safety programs include fewer accidents, downtime and waste. Reduced accidents directly relate to increased productivity from longer stretches of uninterrupted activity and from fewer incidents when supervisors need to retrain and retool the processes.

## How can companies ensure they are constantly improving their safety programs?

Supervisors should continually review safety programs instead of glancing at them every three months. Effective safety programs tie into decreased waste, accidents and downtime. This continual improvement tends to happen most frequently when supervisors have it as part of their performance reviews. Holding supervisors accountable for safety shows managers' commitment to safety. This commitment and accountability leads to the ongoing effort necessary for dynamic, effective safety programs.

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