

## **Do You Have That Safety Attitude?**

*True commitment to workplace safety is not a "program," but rather a company value.*

By Patsy Stuke

Nearly all company executives will tell you they care about their workers' safety and health. But often, talk is cheap when it comes to safety. Effective safety programs cost money, and some people just don't see the value.

Spending money on safety is essential to a company's overall performance. Even though safety doesn't generate revenue and profits the way other parts of the business do, it can cut workers' compensation costs, improve productivity, avoid OSHA fines and reduce accidents.

### **Excuses, Excuses**

Some company executives say they just don't have time for safety. Others say they don't have the money, or there'll be time to work on safety issues later. But without the solid commitment from upper management, it is difficult for a safety program to succeed. Employees look to their employers to provide the necessary tools and training to keep them safe. Safety success starts from the top down.

All too often when a company has an accident, the search is on to find someone to blame. Most often, the blame falls to the employee. He was careless. She's accident prone. He didn't follow proper procedures. Sound familiar? Blaming the injured employee never solves the problem. Think proactive, not reactive. A good safety program has training and reminders in place to keep employees aware of the dangers associated with their jobs.

Some of America's safest companies include tiny Quincy Compressor of Bay Minette, Ala., with 141 employees, and mighty Johnson & Johnson with 108,000 employees in 54 countries. One is large and the other small; however, they have something in common. They treat safety as a business value. It's not a process, not a priority, not a program, but something of *value*.

### **Good for Business**

Liberty Mutual, the nation's leading provider of workers' compensation insurance, reports that 95 percent of large and mid-size companies interviewed report that they get a return on investment of at least three dollars for every dollar invested in safety. These leaders understand that dollars invested in safety improve the company's financial performance.

A recently completed research project by the University of Florida indicates the average direct cost for a single disabling injury is about \$30,000, with indirect costs significantly higher. That information should be reason enough for business owners to sit up and take notice. It's easy sometimes to sit back and say, "It won't happen to us," but it's another matter when it happens to your employee. Every minute of the day, approximately 50 American workers suffer a workplace injury. Those injuries cost about \$128 billion annually.

As an employer, you may want to rethink your attitude about safety. Some key signs pointing to management's commitment to safety are:

- Safety is fully integrated into the business process.
- Safety leaders report directly to the executive level.

Losses are discussed at executive meetings.

Potential managers are asked specific questions to help determine their commitment to safety.

The annual safety budget is 2-5 percent of the total budget.

### **n Accountability**

Establish goals for a safety accountability program, assign responsibility for attaining goals, measure progress toward achieving goals and reward individuals accountable for meeting established goals.

A management accountability plan should include, at a minimum, allocating losses back to the originating business unit. Loss control commitment depends on demonstrated savings in productivity, quality or legal obligation.

A good safety program will outline in a written document those activities that an organization is conducting to reduce accidents and make the facility safe and healthful for employees. A safety program lists plans and actions to be used to reduce accidents and eliminate unsafe work practices. Most important, it lets the employee know you care.