

Going Beyond Compliance

Regulatory agencies such as the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) were created to assure safe and healthy working conditions for working men and women by setting and enforcing standards. OSHA was created at a time when injury and death rates in the United States were at an all-time high. Through the years, regulatory agencies have focused their resources where they could have the greatest impact in reducing injuries, illnesses and deaths in the workplace. Private-sector companies are required to adhere to hundreds of health and safety standards in their workplace. Throughout the past couple of decades, the common focus of organizational health and safety programs has been attaining “compliance” with regulatory standards. Unfortunately, being compliant with all regulatory standards will not prevent all injuries and illnesses from occurring in the workplace. In today’s world, companies tend to go above and beyond compliance standards in efforts to achieve zero injuries.

Compliance is only one part of safety. Typically, once an organization accomplishes the basics of safety compliance, they will continue to move forward in going beyond compliance. For many companies, that next step becomes focusing on employee involvement. Safety excellence requires much more from employees than following rules and being told what to do. Every employee should be encouraged to take responsibility of their personal safety as well as the shared responsibility of the safety of their peers.

So what is employee engagement? In general, employee engagement can be defined as the emotional commitment the employee has

to the organization and its goals. When employee engagement is tied to workplace safety, the employee has an emotional commitment to the safety of the organization and they are actively involved in the process of achieving the goal of creating a safer workplace. Employee engagement is not a checklist, a written program or a routine meeting. Employee engagement is a culture established within an organization that ultimately the workforce wants to be a part of.

Cultures in which employees are engaged in their work are safer places to work. Gallup’s 2016 meta-analysis study examined more than 82,000 business units and 1.8 million employees in 230 organizations, across 49 industries and in 73 countries. The study shows that business units with engagement scores in the top quartile of Gallup’s employee engagement database have 70% fewer safety incidents compared with bottom-quartile units.

Employee engagement is not required by the government like other programs such as lockout/tagout or confined space. However, engagement has a direct correlation to safety performance. Those organizations that establish an engaged safety culture are safer than those organizations with a compliance-only safety program. Worker “buy-in” to safety efforts will be more successful within an environment that promotes empowerment because it provides internal incentives, which in turn give workers a feeling of accomplishment and control of their workplace. W. Edwards Deming said, “People support what they help create.” Giving employees involvement opportunities gives them a sense of belonging and ownership. Employees that are empowered and

Hazards are ever-present in the steel plant environment, and a heightened awareness and emphasis on safety is a necessary priority for our industry. This monthly column, coordinated by members of the AIST Safety & Health Technology Committee, focuses on procedures and practices to promote a safe working environment for everyone.



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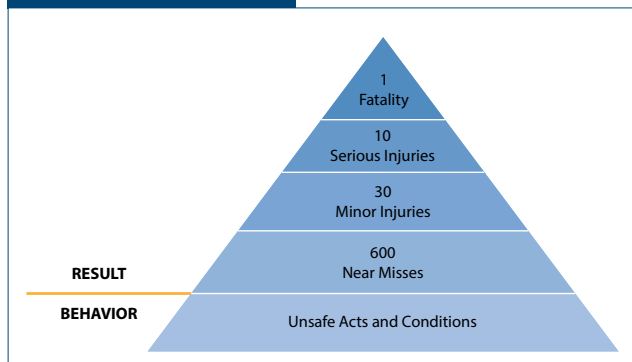
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Figure 1

*Heinrich Pyramid.*

fully integrated into their safety culture understand the reasoning behind safety processes such as safe work procedures, risk assessments and training sessions because they were involved in the process and added input. With increased engagement and understanding, there is a decrease in unsafe actions and behaviors. Less unsafe behaviors create a trickle effect in an organization's safety performance. According to the Heinrich Pyramid theory, for every one fatality, there have been 10 severe injuries, 30 minor injuries, 600 near misses and 300,000 unsafe acts and conditions (Fig 1). At the foundation of the pyramid lies behavior. Therefore, fewer unsafe acts and behaviors cause the width of the triangle to narrow, which ultimately results in a decreased number of injuries.

So where does an organization begin when wanting to improve employee engagement? The first step is gaining leadership support. If upper management does not truly believe in the power of engagement, it will be an uphill battle for everyone. In order to have a successful employee engagement culture, leadership must actively promote and fully support those determined initiatives. Employee engagement must be made an organizational priority. Once leadership support is achieved, a program should be established with defined objectives and activities in which workers will be involved. The defined goals and objectives should be specific for the program. Just "improving engagement" will not be enough to connect with managers and employees. In addition, an organization should create a committee, consisting of plant-floor members with management facilitation, to start up the program. Involvement in the beginning of the process is key to creating and kicking off a successful and sustainable engagement culture. When determining the objectives of the program, select a corresponding metric and target date that is both attainable and will make a significant impact on the business. Another key to a successful engagement program is choosing safety engagement "champions." Changing a culture is not an easy task. To create a culture focused on safety

and engagement, there needs to be champions who are passionate about not only the concept of engagement but also about driving change and influencing others. This new program will need passionate "early adopters" from different areas and levels of the organization, such as operations, maintenance, shop floor employees, managers and support staff. Lastly, the company should provide training resources to the workforce on the safety engagement program. It is key to communicate the background behind the program, the goals and objectives, expectations, and defined roles and responsibilities. In addition, training and development should also cover any new activities, processes or standards implemented.

To create a safety culture focused on empowerment and participation, the program should implement targeted actions to improve engagement in various areas of an organization. Successful programs fulfill a serious need or indicate significance to the individual and the organization. The employees shall be given the proper responsibility and authority to accomplish the tasks. The employees need to be given the proper time to complete tasks that are being asked of them and they should be recognized when the tasks are completed. There are dozens of activities that can be included in a safety engagement program. The following list details those activities that are found to be successful in engaging the workforce in the safety culture:

- Incident investigations.
- Safety inspections and audits.
- Engineering projects.
- Toolbox talks.
- Safety committees.
- Peer-to-peer observations.
- Safety drills.
- Emergency response teams.
- Safety improvement projects.
- Safety training.
- Writing of safe work procedures.

Health and safety management systems, such as OSHA's Voluntary Protection Program (VPP), American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Z10, International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 45001 and OSHA Assessment Series (OSHAS) 18001, go above and beyond compliance. Organizations challenge themselves to take a systematic approach to safety by working toward achieving a health and safety management system certification. These systems all involve some form of employee engagement. The employee participation elements may vary with the specific requirements; however, each safety management system highlights the importance of employee involvement. For example, OSHA's VPP requires a system to be established where employees are fully

integrated into the organization's safety and health management system and are active in hazard assessment, inspections, safety and health training, and/or evaluation of the safety and health management system. ANSI Z10 requires involvement by all employee levels of the organization, resources, and time to participate in planning, implementation, evaluation, corrective and preventive action, and access to relevant safety management system information. Examples of ANSI Z10 employee participation activities include incident investigations, procedure development, safety related audits, training development, job safety analysis, planning process and safety committee involvement. Regulatory agencies fully support process safety management efforts.

Employee engagement can extend beyond the health and safety field. Companies see a positive effect in all areas of their organization when their workforce is emotionally connected to the business. Employee engagement can be linked to profitable business results by positively impacting productivity, quality, employee retention, customer satisfaction and sales growth.

- **Productivity:** Engaged employees have 18% higher productivity and 60% higher quality than less engaged employees.
- **Quality:** Among Fortune 100 companies, there was a 1,000% decrease in errors among engaged employees versus disengaged employee populations.
- **Employee Retention:** Engaged employees are 87% less likely to leave an organization.
- **Customer Satisfaction:** Companies with highly engaged employees score between 12% and 34% higher in customer satisfaction ratings.
- **Sales Growth:** Each incremental percentage of employees who become engaged predicts an incremental 0.6% growth in sales.
- **Competitive Advantage:** Companies with highly engaged workforces outperform their peers by 147% in earnings per share.

An unsafe workplace can have extensive effects on a company and its employees. A company's bottom line can be significantly damaged through endless insurance claims, costly regulatory fines, and not to forget a decrease in productivity, sales and quality. Although money is important to any organization, no company can quantify the pain and suffering experienced by the employees and the families of those employees involved in serious occupational incidents. Given the potential consequences of a safety incident, leaders can't afford to be anything but methodical and systematic about safety. Regardless of industry or company size, all organizations should embed employee engagement into the foundation of their safety culture in order to create that "want to" safety atmosphere.

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