

Risk Manager

Answers, resources and information to help assess and reduce risk

Workplace Safety Accountability How Do You Measure Up? By Kyle Stewart

The concept of workplace safety is often reflected by employees as either of the following: safe work practice or unsafe work practice; preventable act or unpreventable act; or the correct or incorrect method of performing a work task(s) that may have resulted in a workplace injury. However, in terms of the employee's accountability to workplace safety, too often we are detached in our ability as "employees" and "employers" to perceive the "gray area;" whereas, unsafe work practices are typically labeled as a "black" or "white" issue. In the absence of holding an employee accountable for their decision(s), which may or may not have resulted in an injury (at least this time), we continue to promote a culture that may lead to a trend of workplace injuries that can quickly spiral in the wrong direction. Organizations typically do not reflect on the "gray area", which should be considered as an opportunity to implement a corrective action and/or preventative measure to prevent a similar injury in the future. Most of all, organizations should make the most of these events as an opportunity to change the safety culture among all staff members.

Incorporating a safety accountability program is not, and should not, be utilized strictly as a disciplinary tool to address workplace safety, as it may have an adverse negative effect on employee morale. Many of you are probably asking yourselves, "How do I build a safety accountability program?" Unfortunately, there is not one single answer, but rather a multitude of elements, such as conducting periodic/annual safety awareness training,

discussing safety during each department and/or faculty meeting, communicating safety concerns to correct unsafe work practices and/or behaviors, conducting facility safety inspections and implementing initiatives to promote safety accountability. Consequently, you may be thinking that the district's safety committee is currently performing many of these functions already; however, is the information being communicated to EVERY district staff member on a routine basis? The saying, "Practice makes perfect" also applies to safety. You cannot expect safety accountability if you are not consistently communicating and discussing safety on a regular basis with all staff members.

Listed below are core elements to assist with instituting an effective safety accountability program:

Value and responsibility: Safety must be a clear value of the district, each staff member from the administration, instructional and support staff is treated equally responsible and accountable for workplace safety.

Establish standards: Applies to district policies, work task procedures or safety rules that clearly communicate safety and health roles, including what is expected from each staff member.

Provide safety resources: Provide and require mandatory safety training that is applicable to the audience and/or based on injury trends, dedicate time to regularly discuss and communicate safety issues with staff members during department/faculty meetings and/or use numerous channels to ensure awareness is perceived, supervise work task(s) to identify areas of improvement, etc.

Measurement system: Was each staff member provided new-hire safety orientation? Were the organization's safety policies, work task procedures and/or safety rules conveyed to each staff member? Are safety policies re-viewed with staff members periodically (not just following an injury)? Did each staff member attend general awareness and/or work task-specific safety training? Are supervisors and/or department heads communicating safety awareness with all staff members on a regular basis (i.e., weekly, monthly, etc.)? Were corrective actions and/or preventative measures implemented to correct an identified safety deficiency?

Note: The measurement of each employee's safety accountability is determined based on the job classification's responsibility and authority; below are examples of responsibilities and authority for varying job classification(s):

Administration: Measurement at this level includes personal safety behavior and activities such as following and enforcing the organization's safety and health rules, providing the resources to supervisors/department heads to arrange for safety awareness training and/or implementing corrective actions and/or preventative measures.

Supervisors/Department Heads: Measurement should include personal safety behavior and safety activities which they are able to control (i.e., providing personal protective equipment (PPE), materials handling equipment, development of specific work-task procedures, etc.), enforcing safety rules among their respective employees, facilitating safety discussions, meetings and/or

training, and implementing corrective actions and/or preventative measures to correct safety hazards.

Employees: Comply with safety policies, procedures and rules, utilize the appropriate PPE, materials handling equipment and/or work-task procedure, report safety hazards to designated employee and report all workplace injuries.

Consequences (think positive and negative): Remember, the purpose of a safety accountability program is to promote each staff member to be personally responsible and accountable for their actions. Negative consequences (i.e., disciplinary actions) should not be exercised for first-time offenders. Instead, use the offense and/or disregard for safety as an opportunity to correct the behavior so that the employee does not repeat the unsafe behavior. Disciplinary action should only be employed after an attempt(s) to correct the unsafe behavior is disregarded by the employee and/or if the employee fails to attempt to correct the unsafe behavior.

For additional information or training on best practices and safety management within your school entity, please contact Director of Risk Management Sharon Orr at (866) 401-6600, ext. 7152 or sorr@cmregent.com.