

ON | Savings in Safety | CA

By Candace Gwaltney



Long-term Benefits Outweigh Short-term Shortcuts

It's like an insurance policy. If you don't have it, something catastrophic is going to happen.

Spending resources on workplace safety may be hard to justify for some companies, especially those struggling during the recession, when outcomes aren't easy to measure.

Bruce Guiliani, director of safety and loss control for Heritage Group Safety, states it bluntly: "Unfortunately in safety, you don't know. The next time a guy falls off a ladder, does he just get embarrassed or does he die? There's the problem. It's not an easy thing to say you save X dollars."

Companies that champion safety and industry experts agree on this: the true savings are invaluable. Those who don't recognize that will pay much more in the end.

Economy of safety

Like many companies, Frankfort-based DSM NeoResins+ is looking at ways to reduce costs. But those cuts will not interfere with the company's No. 1 priority, notes Kevin Goodnight, the U.S. safety, health and environmental manager.

"Our approach is safety is always the first priority," he asserts. "So whenever we talk about any sort of savings or programs we have in place for getting through the harsh economic times, we always talk about safety first. We will not skimp on safety."

That level of dedication has paid off – the company recently marked 22 years with no loss-time accidents, Goodnight relates.

Unfortunately, not all companies demonstrate that type of commitment. Guiliani says many organizations don't look at it as a savings measure.

"The biggest problem with safety is you really don't know how much money you've saved with it, so you see that (investment) as an expense," he shares.

Instead of keeping employees up-to-date on training, those companies think they can "get by" and catch everyone up later, Guiliani states. His company offers training programs across the country.

"Especially in times when money is tight, your cost of accident becomes much more of a burden," he explains. "Obviously, if money is tight, you don't want to have any losses."

DSM NeoResins+ employees are held responsible for their own safety, which helps make efforts

successful. "We make sure that everyone is engaged in participation; we train; and we hold people accountable," Goodnight surmises. "That is a very important part of the whole system."

In turn, employees know they are valued. The worldwide company's priorities are ranked as: people, planet, profit. "They want to make sure the people are healthy and safe and that they go home every night in the same shape that they came in that day," Goodnight notes.

Washington offensive

If protecting workers isn't enough encouragement to implement a safety culture, increased federal enforcement may be.

When U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis spoke at the annual American Society of Safety Engineers conference this summer, she gave the industry a startle, Robert Baldwin explains. Baldwin is president of Safety Resources, a consulting and training services firm in Zionsville.

"We are probably about to experience some of the most focused and high-intensity regulatory pressure that we've seen in some time," Baldwin asserts.

Solis emphasized the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is back in the enforcement business and that will be the agency's focused mission. She de-emphasized Voluntary Protection Programs and mentioned lobbying Congress for increased fines and penalties. Federal officials want increased enforcement to be a consistent message among states as well, Baldwin learned.

The message from Indiana's Department of Labor has been that the state is friendly to industry while keeping workplace safety a priority. Although any increased federal regulation will likely have a larger effect on states such as Ohio and Illinois that are under federal OSHA programs, states that have their own program (like Indiana) could be required to follow federal changes, Baldwin relates.

Comfortable solutions

Constant improvements are a part of safety for Emerson Industrial Automation – Power Transmission in Monticello, says Keith Tolen, environmental health and safety coordinator.

Chamber Serves as Training Resource

The Indiana Chamber has been a top statewide provider of safety training over the past 15 years. Its popular programs include OSHA compliance, recordkeeping, forklift safety, hazard recognition and more. Attendees benefit from the expertise of highly rated Bill Pfister of Jasper-based Safety Training and Consulting.

In addition, the Indiana Safety and Health Conference & Expo has become the leading industry event in the state. The Central Indiana Chapter of the American Society of Safety Engineers and the Chamber partner with the Indiana Department of Labor/INSafe and the American Industrial Hygiene Association – Indiana Section. The 2010 event (www.insafetyconf.com) will take place March 1-3.

Resource: Conferences section of www.indianachamber.com for upcoming programs



A Rolls-Royce engineer performs safety inspections on a gas turbine engine. With more than 4,000 Indianapolis employees, the company conveys safety messages to workers through television, e-mails, meetings and posted information.

The company received the 2009 Governor's Workplace Safety Award for innovation by a medium-sized organization.

Emerson Power Transmission rewrote its safety investigation reporting forms so that action is taken immediately any time an accident or near-miss (almost accident) occurs, Tolen shares. The facility also keeps employees involved in safety and takes action based on worker recommendations.

This year the company placed a higher emphasis on ergonomics by creating a team to address the growing concern.

"We've got an aging workforce, so ergonomics is becoming a real issue when you are dealing with people getting older," Tolen asserts. "You want to try to fit the job to the person, not the person to the job; that's our motto."

After looking at problem areas, custom-made tools were built that allow employees to complete work in more ergonomically sound ways while keeping them out of the point of danger, he explains.

Technology continues to help companies address ergonomic issues, relates John Lindenschmidt, president of RMS-Safety. The Indianapolis-based consulting firm offers health, safety and ergonomic services.

"The need to address ergonomics is more of a business case than ever before, because as we age we are more susceptible to those cumulative trauma disorders," Lindenschmidt says. It continues to be a leading cause for claims at many companies, he adds.

Equipment has become more comfortable and aesthetically pleasing – for even the simplest issues. "The safety glasses of 15 years ago that were big, bulky, didn't fit well and gave you headaches have gone by the wayside. They've been replaced with cool-looking styles that people want to wear all the time," he notes.

'Walking the talk'

At Rolls-Royce Corporation in Indianapolis, it takes more than efforts from the nine-person safety staff to ensure best practices are followed.

"We put a lot of energy into the idea of walking the talk," says Robert Harrison, director of health, safety and environment for Rolls-Royce in North America. "We've been focused on (the idea) that our leadership should demonstrate the behaviors and should lead by example."

With more than 4,000 employees, sharing messages requires a multi-faceted approach. Communicating safety information is accomplished through television monitors around the site,

e-mails, printed materials, bulletin boards and meetings. If a matter is urgent, the company will stop production temporarily to share the message with everyone at once, Harrison relates.

"We're trying to send as many messages (as possible) efficiently without tripping over ourselves, so that people hear it a number of times, so it truly sinks in and so that it doesn't become wallpaper," he asserts.

The economy is causing Harrison to focus more heavily on the environmental portion of his job description. Rolls-

Royce is looking more closely at energy efficiency to improve operations and save money. The company would eventually like to implement technologies such as wind energy so it can be removed from the energy grid.

Similarly, DSM NeoResins+ has found savings through recycling and attempts to reduce greenhouse gases. Those efforts go along with the company's safety, health and environmental plan, Goodnight notes.

Safe call

There's no doubt tough decisions have to be made with the economic conditions, Baldwin contends. Some cuts may need to occur in safety programming, but he urges companies to make sure they aren't creating an even bigger problem.

How a company approaches safety often is a predictor of its long-term vitality, Lindenschmidt sums up.

"Many companies, unfortunately, see safety more as an adjunct to running a business, instead of being integral to business. They see it carved out enough that they think they can just slice that off without suffering from a business standpoint," he says.

"You see, (companies') level of commitment to safety is really a manifestation of their commitment and management style of their overall business. Those that tend to carve it out and say 'we'll do that later' are the ones that aren't around in 10 years."

INFORMATION LINK

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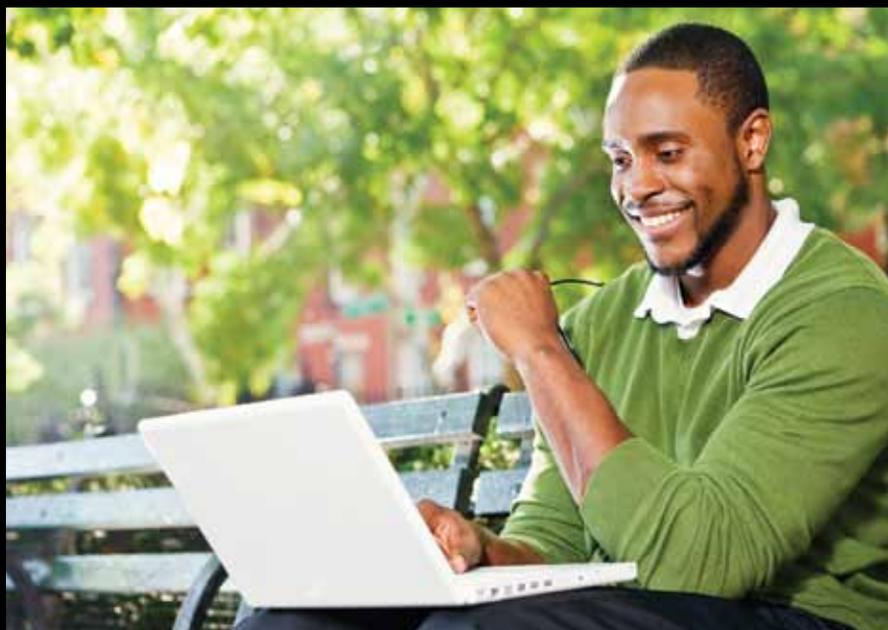
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