

Vince Plank has been a safety advisor at Safety Management Group for nearly four years. He has also served on the board of the Central Indiana Chapter of ASSE since 2009.



# VINCE PLANK

## Volunteer of the Year

By Katie Coffin

In 2013, 127 Hoosiers were killed on the job.

It's a startling statistic – and one that helps drive Vince Plank's passion for occupational safety.

"There's been a steady decline (in work-related deaths) over the past 10 years, but one is too many," laments Plank, who had just facilitated a forklift training session before our interview. "When I did that class, I mentioned that statistic. Those people don't plan on being hurt or killed in a serious work-related injury. They just get up, get their coffee, make their lunch, go to work – follow the same routine. And then something happens.

"Those are 127 parents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters who don't come home. That's really why I do safety, and I'd say that's why most safety professionals do what they do."

Plank, a safety advisor at Safety Management Group (SMG), is a certified safety professional. He's an active member of the Central

Indiana Chapter of the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE) and has been instrumental (in partnership with the Indiana Chamber) in growing the annual Indiana Safety and Health Conference.

### 'Heavy work'

Plank asserts he doesn't have a "great story" for how he got into safety, though he recounts his career to this point with energy and enthusiasm.

His father was a maintenance mechanic at Eli Lilly, a career where safety precautions meant the difference between good health and serious injury. Plank began pursuing the safety management profession as a freshman at Indiana State University (ISU).

"I thought I wanted to do something in the medical field," Plank shares. "So I got into safety, and now I try to help prevent people from seeing the doctor because of occupational health and safety injuries. Seeing my dad come home safe every day from what could be considered pretty dangerous work played into (my career decision)."

Plank got his feet wet with an internship at Walsh Construction, a general contracting, construction management and design-build firm. This was new to him, as his ISU degree track focused more on general industry (e.g., manufacturing and warehousing) than construction.

"That really opened my eyes to real work," Plank recalls. "And highway construction is heavy work."

Walsh Construction offered him a job at its headquarters in Chicago, but the big city didn't appeal to Plank, a Hoosier at heart who grew up in Vermillion County.

Instead, he moved to Indianapolis for a job with TOA (USA), LLC, a Japan-based metal stamping and automotive suspension parts manufacturer. He was its first full-time health and safety professional, and he built the safety program from the ground up.

He continued in the automotive industry with a role at International Automotive Components in Greencastle. After just two years, he was promoted to a regional position that required significant travel. He and his wife, Renee, welcomed their first child the year before, and Plank was not willing to be away from home so often.

That transition, and his connections through ASSE, led him to his current position with SMG. He has been with the professional safety service company for nearly four years, working with clients to develop, implement and improve safety programs.

### Safety first

Plank has served on the ASSE board since 2009, and has been the secretary, president-elect and president. He recently transitioned into the past president role, where he serves as the nominations and elections chair and a mentor to the current president.

The Indiana Chamber and ASSE formed a partnership more than 10 years ago to jointly host the Indiana Safety and Health Conference. Through his leadership roles with ASSE, Plank chaired the 2013 conference, served as conference host in 2014 and 2015, and is currently co-chair for the 2016 conference. Responsibilities include helping to draft the agenda, securing speakers and serving as a moderator.

"Vince shows great enthusiasm for the safety and health industry and educating his colleagues," praises Kerri Begley, Indiana Chamber vice president of conferences and special events. "He is an excellent resource for industry information and a great communicator. Vince takes his role very seriously and is driven by the knowledge that our collaborative efforts help save lives."

The Indiana Safety and Health Conference has grown each year since the partnership. Plank said the goal for the upcoming event, which will take place in March 2016, is to exceed 1,000 attendees. He credits the hard work of "a great group of volunteers," including his personal mentors Bruce Guiliani (2012 Volunteer of the Year) and Claudia

Niehaus (an ASSE past president), and current ASSE board members, for the continued success of the conference.

### Faith and stewardship

Plank was first introduced to ASSE while a student at ISU. The Central Indiana chapter awarded him a \$500 scholarship, and Guiliani and Jim Kriner (an ASSE past president) presented it to him. Today, the scholarship is named in honor of Kriner, who died suddenly in 2007. Through the ASSE Foundation, the Central Indiana chapter continues to award the scholarship that Plank won years ago to up-and-coming safety professionals.

“I couldn’t imagine being off the ASSE board because it just means so much to give back,” Plank remarks.

Plank makes a difference in other ways as well.

He serves on the committee for the Metro Indianapolis Coalition for Construction Safety Certification (MICCS) program. MICCS is dedicated to the elimination of construction and facilities maintenance jobsite injuries. Plank is also involved with the SMG philanthropy



Planning the annual Indiana Safety and Health Conference is a lengthy process. Here, Plank meets with Indiana Chamber staff and ASSE volunteers in August about the March 2016 event.

team, a group of employee advisors who review charitable requests made by other employees and plan philanthropic events.

Outside of safety work, Plank is a self-proclaimed family man. He and his wife are expecting their third child in December.

“My faith as a Christian inspires me to

give back,” Plank shares. “We’re called to be stewards. I have to manage the time I’m given and the resources I’m given and use those wisely.”

Though Plank may insist his story isn’t “great,” there is no question his efforts and those of ASSE have made a difference in the safety industry and beyond.

**RESOURCE:** Vince Plank, Safety Management Group, Inc., at [www.safetymanagementgroup.com](http://www.safetymanagementgroup.com)



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