

By Tom Schuman

# Enhancing Workplace Safety

## Key Elements Include Employee Behaviors, Involvement

It's difficult to find a company that doesn't champion workplace safety and support the well-being of its employees. After all, a safe environment and a happy workforce help increase productivity and ultimate business success.

But how committed is your organization? Bobbi Samples, vice president of safety and health compliance with SES Environmental, Health and Safety, says a big factor is "whether a company has a value for safety or just a priority. Priorities can be shuffled to the bottom sometimes."

CAUTION

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Safety may only be a priority if:

- a team leader doesn't go to the safety meeting because he or she has to get that day's shipment out. Or, even more telling, the safety meeting doesn't take place at all;
- there is a policy that safety glasses with side shields must be worn on the shop floor at all times, but the plant manager or company president will have his or her safety glasses on top of their head; or
- a company is still struggling with compliance issues, striving to meet Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations.

Bill Search, a partner at EHS Technology Group, comments that the OSHA standards "really present a minimum to be done for a compliance effort. In order to have a truly excellent safety program, you have to get off the focus on regulations and go beyond that."

Behavior based safety (BBS) is what many strive for, but few are able to achieve. BBS goes well beyond a company valuing safety. It is establishing and maintaining a safety culture to the point that employees are fully engaged. They alter their behaviors – both on the job and outside the workplace – to achieve maximum results. They observe each other and their adherence to safety policies and principles. This is done not for individual gain, but for team and company achievement.

Richard Hawk, a national safety expert who delivered the keynote presentation at the Indiana Chamber's 2006 Indiana Safety & Health Conference & Expo (the 2007 event will take place February 13-14), notes that BBS has been in play for many years. "The main way to get the biggest bang for your buck is to change people's behaviors. But as we know, that's not easy to do."

## Getting started

What does it take to raise safety to the highest levels? Not surprisingly, it's an allegiance throughout the organization, beginning at the top.

"Probably first and foremost is true management commitment to a safe working environment," Search offers, adding that actions speak louder than words. "Employees have to see it demonstrated. It comes about through consistency, through continual improvement. If employees see that, then they're more willing to buy in and take that leadership role. There has to be an environment that encourages people to take ownership of the safety program."

Again, all of that is easier said than done.

"It takes time and resources," Samples states. "Most people don't realize it takes a minimum three-year commitment to see a significant return. You don't change a culture overnight. Many people try to do it without a lot of preparation. You've got to get employee input from the beginning."

Employers must give in the short term to realize long-term benefits. Time spent in training is time spent off the shop floor. The same is true



## New Horizons Baking: 10 Years of Safety and Counting

**M**ark Duke has been with New Horizons Baking Company for 27 years. In an industry in which companies are fortunate to go one year without a lost-time accident, the Fremont-based operation reached an amazing 10 consecutive accident-free years in early June.

Bringing plant manager Bob Creighton – and his inclusive philosophies – on board was a key turning point, Duke recalls. Instead of a drawing for one big prize for an employee when a major accomplishment takes place, multiple smaller gifts make everyone feel like a winner. That is just one example of how the company works with its employees.

"Bob's concept was to get everybody involved in safety, not just the safety team. We had safety meetings in which we started to focus on people and how to treat them. Instead of the typical 'how I want to be treated,' we treat people the way they want to be treated."

Duke, as plant superintendent, comes in early to see the night shift before it leaves, is there throughout the day shift and also on hand when the afternoon shift begins its work. "The key is getting to know the people. We talk about their hobbies, their kids." It's no accident that perfect monthly attendance has increased from 61% to its current 90%.

The 85 employees at New Horizons (which has a second facility and company headquarters in Norwalk, Ohio) have a dedicated line that makes hamburger buns for McDonald's restaurants. Another line produces English muffins for McDonald's as well as an extended customer base.

While the purchase of some automatic equipment has helped cope with back and shoulder injuries, the danger points in bakeries remain aplenty.

"It's a huge thing, and I don't think it's going to end there," Duke said just prior to the official anniversary date. "It's a great feat for all of us – employees and management. The old saying 'that's not my job,' we don't have that anymore. It's truly enjoyable to come to work."

**Resource: Mark Duke, New Horizons Baking Company, at (800) 227-2867, ext. 319**

with peer-to-peer observations and counseling – key elements in a successful BBS program.

Hawk says all the experts, all the articles concur that safety success begins with the president, CEO or plant manager. He differs only slightly. While leadership has the power and resources, he's found that a "shotgun approach with everybody working together at the same time" can be effective. He's also seen examples in which a maverick group with some power and insight can overcome resistance from the top.

For company officials seeking employee participation and commitment, Hawk believes the key is taking a serious subject and making it fun. That's his emphasis in his writing, speaking, teaching and training.

"I try to imitate – in a fun way – Madison Avenue. Look at how advertisers get us to enjoy something, to tickle our senses. I think we should copy them," he contends. "If you're in safety, you're in sales. Your product is just different. I encourage a company to develop a marketing plan. McDonald's has one. Coke has one. A safety department should spend time developing a marketing plan, reviewing it and selling it to employees."

Hawk cautions, however, on the important difference between fun and play. The latter does not have a place in a safe working environment. Fun, however, is necessary. "People should be energetic and enjoying what they're doing to the best they can."

## Elements in the mix

Other factors come into play in determining a safety culture. There are more documented success cases with larger companies than smaller ones. Why? Samples cites public image, with the larger corporations "always under the microscope." Search adds that the presence of more internal resources – instead of having to rely on an outside program or consultant – can also help the bigger organizations.

Both, however, have seen examples of very small companies that have been able to take advantage of their size and fully integrate their employees into the safety program.

Union workplaces also see both advantages and disadvantages. Search cites some union preferences for separate hourly worker and management safety committees that hinder working together. Samples says that if unions are on board – and they should be with their member safety at stake – they can help drive the process.

Not to be overlooked is safety outside the workplace. According to the National Safety Council, companies experience \$200 billion in lost productivity due to off-the-job injuries. If a true safety culture is in place, Search says, employees will, for example, be more likely to wear ear protection when mowing the lawn, a dust mask when sawing wood and eye protection when building that deck on the back of the house.

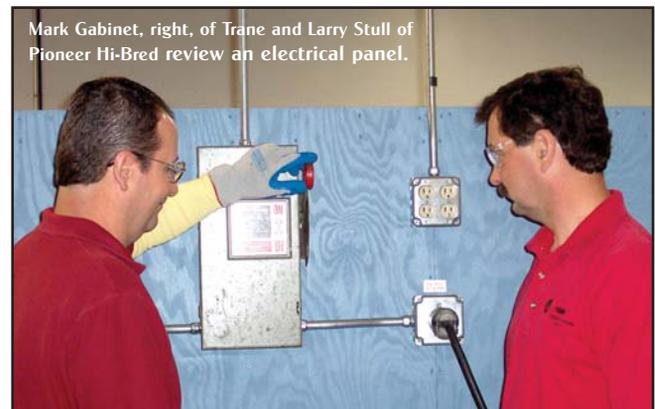
While costs are involved, Samples believes that company leaders who truly understand realize "it doesn't take a lot of money to save money. You have lower worker's compensation rates, less lost time away from work, higher morale, better cohesiveness. Not implementing a safety program is going to cost you money."

In real estate, the saying is that the top three factors are

location, location and location. For companies seeking safety success, Samples alters the lineup to communication, communication and communication. A solid communications structure must be in place for implementation of a BBS program.

## Achieving success

The barriers to safety success are noteworthy. Two Indiana companies that have overcome those obstacles and can serve as models for others are Johns Manville and Unilever – among the 2006 winners of the Governor's Workplace Safety Awards,



Mark Gabinet, right, of Trane and Larry Stull of Pioneer Hi-Bred review an electrical panel.

## Company Reaches Out to Others

Advancing safety initiatives at your company is not a solo act, says Mark Gabinet. The environmental, health and safety manager for the Trane Company in Rushville believes much can be learned from others – no matter the industry.

Trane, part of American Standard, manufactures components for air conditioners. At first glance, its metal fabrication does not appear to have many similarities with the seed business of Pioneer Hi-Bred International.

Pioneer officials came to Trane, with a return visit set for later this year.

"We have similarities on the big picture. We both want a better safety culture and more involvement from employees," Gabinet shares. "With the plant tour, it was good to have an outside set of eyes look at what we do. They offered some tips on electrical that we hope to implement."

The internal safety methods differ in many areas, but Gabinet views the two-way exchange as a positive. A similar visit is planned with a local foundry.

As part of a larger company, officials at Rushville will also have the opportunity to go to three other Trane sites within easy traveling distance. Gabinet will share how Rushville was among the first facilities to eliminate high-risk ergonomic activities, while he looks to learn in other areas.

No matter the business or facility, he says communication is critical. An internal television system and company newsletter are just a few of the methods used. Every shift begins with a safety tip and a clear focus is to "make sure everyone knows who they can report a safety concern to."

**Resource: Mark Gabinet, Trane, at (765) 932-7224**



Safety protection is essential on and off the job.

a program organized by the Indiana Chamber and the Indiana Department of Labor.

Ray Darmer is plant manager at the Johns Manville facility in Bremen, which manufactures foam insulation used in industrial roofing and residential building applications.

The renewed safety efforts at Johns Manville began about eight years ago, Darmer reports. He says the company was determined to move from a “productivity first” culture to one in which productivity, quality and safety were all equal parts. Success has been achieved in all three areas.

The company has gone more than 8½ years without a lost time accident. Productivity has gradually improved (from an 85% yield to 95% efficiency) and the number of rejected materials has gone down.

How did they do it in an operation that includes eight saw blades running at all times, speeds of up to 150 feet a minute on the production line, high forklift traffic that includes loading between 25 and 35 trucks a day and moving insulation off the product line and into storage, as

well as the presence of several potentially hazardous chemicals?

- Effective orientation. New employees learn “what it means to work at Johns Manville,” observe co-workers and train under the watchful eye of supervisors before being placed on the job.
- Safety first. “If someone is asked to do something they’re not trained on, they should politely say, ‘I’ve not been trained on that JSA (job safety analysis).’ We expect them to live up to that.” In addition, any employee who feels unsafe conditions are present may hit the emergency stop button without any repercussions.
- Listening to employees. After the need was demonstrated, the purchase of walkie-talkies for improved communications on the manufacturing floor.
- Documentation. The JSA sheets contain specific points relative to each task. In late 2005, work began on Job Task Videos (JTVs), which allow employees to sit and watch how something should be done. They are able to see the potential risks and how to avoid them.

“This is a major undertaking,” according to Darmer. “We’ve got over 130 (videos) in production, 100 in maintenance and 60 in shipping. It will probably take us about two to three years to complete. All 23 Johns Manville plants in the U.S. on the roofing side are implementing this program with their contractors.”

Ongoing training is another important aspect. Access to computer-based programs has been in place for some time. Pure Safety is a recently implemented program that tests employees on what they learned in the computer lessons. Darmer points to results that include improved communication as employees share their thoughts and debate the correct answers.

The company works to incorporate the total safety concept that Search identifies as an important element. An annual safety banquet that includes spouses and a safety poster contest for family members are among the initiatives.

Emergency medical equipment, an eye wash and safety shower, along with stop signs and dedicated walkways are part of the safety program at Johns Manville.

WITHOUT A RECORDABLE ACCIDENT  
THE BEST PREVIOUS RECORD WAS  
DAYS  
DO YOUR PART TO HELP MAKE A NEW RECORD



“We want people to come to work with all five fingers on one hand and go home with all five fingers on one hand,” Darmer concludes. In looking at the overall improvements in recent years, he says, “It goes to prove that if you’ve got your housekeeping in order, a lot of things will fall into line.”

### Taking a close look

John Munjas is safety, health and environmental coordinator for the Unilever bar soap manufacturing operation in Hammond. A good safety record had reached a certain plateau before the company implemented its behavior-based program in 2002.

“The first thing we did is take a survey of how safety is perceived at our site,” Munjas recalls. “We found it was bucketed in the safety department. People didn’t feel a day-to-day connection to safety.”

A steering committee of both salaried and union employees reviewed past incidents and received in-depth training in safety program theory and critical behaviors. Among the end results has been a “SOAPY – Safety Observations Are Protecting You” – initiative that has taken employee-led safety to a new level.

“People go out with a checklist and watch others do their jobs. They don’t have to know all about the job (due to the checklists),” Munjas explains. “They look for things like ergonomic risks, lockout/tagout conditions, clean floors. The individuals talk to each other. From the observations, we get suggestions on how to make the job safer.”

Root causes of behavior are identified. Action plans are put into place to improve safety conditions. A current initiative includes involving more shop floor personnel into the planning and implementation stages to raise the employee ownership to an even higher level.

On a voluntary basis, plant personnel have been trained for the observation role. When the program began, observations were strictly peer to peer. A short time later, inter-peer observations – anyone can be in the role of observing anyone else, no matter their position – were put into place. The total number of observations is more than 1,200 per year.

“The participation has gone up quite a bit. When it started a lot of people had doubts whether it would last,” Munjas admits. “But when you get one person in a group started doing the observations, others follow. People have seen results from what we’re doing. They like being observed by shift supervisors, department supervisors or the plant manager. It helps break down the walls that are sometimes between union and management.”

At Unilever, frequency recordable rates are used as one safety measure. In the 1.6 to 2.0 range prior to this process, the rate declined to 0.62 in 2005. Personnel from Hammond have been presenters at the Behavioral Science Technology user conference, discussing the inter-peer observations, and are trying to share the local progress with other Unilever sites.

The goal, Munjas maintains, is to continue to increase participation and improve the overall safety performance.

### Unlocking the potential

Hawk tells the story of a company that brought him in to resuscitate its annual safety training. In year one, his focus was



**Employee observations, and follow-up discussions, help produce safety improvements at the Unilever manufacturing operation in Hammond.**

on training the trainers. The second year evolved into a Special Olympics that featured unusual safety events, but more importantly helped cultivate a growing safety culture.

The initial sessions were met with rave reviews and the company manager received a substantial promotion. In year three, Hawk was not invited back. The company was planning to organize and conduct its own safety carnival.

No, it wasn’t a flop and progress realized during the first two years lost. In fact, it was a magnificent success.

“The point is that they always could have done that,” Hawk says. “They didn’t ever need me.” All companies, he emphasizes, have the capabilities to unlock the safety components within their organizations. They simply must find the key and use it. Both the employer and employees will benefit.

#### INFORMATION LINK

**Resources:** Bobbi Samples, SES Environmental, Health and Safety, at (877) 882-1925 or [www.sesenvironmental.net](http://www.sesenvironmental.net)

Bill Search, EHS Technology Group, at (800) 356-9039 or [www.ehstech.com](http://www.ehstech.com)

Richard Hawk at [www.richardhawkinc.com](http://www.richardhawkinc.com)

Raymond Darmer, Johns Manville, at (574) 546-1811

John Munjas, Unilever, at (219) 473-7273