

Developing an Effective Safety and Health Program



Suggestions for Business Owners and Managers



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Introduction

What is a workplace safety and health program?

A workplace safety and health program is a term that describes what people, business owners, managers and employees do to prevent injuries and illnesses at their workplace.

A workplace safety and health program is just a concept, but it is an important one. Think for a moment about how you prevent injuries and illnesses at your workplace. Your safety and health program reflects how you manage the safety and health of your employees.

Safety and health programs: they are not all the same.

There are probably as many different types of safety and health programs as there are businesses. If you manage just a few employees in a low-risk industry, your program is likely to be a simple one: just being a careful observer, listening to your employees' concerns and responding to them, for example.

As businesses grow and become more complex, so do their safety and health programs. Safety and health programs are known by many different names: Safety and Health Management System, Illness and Injury Prevention Program, Accident and Illness Prevention Program, etc. The important thing is to realize that it is a comprehensive system to address the hazards at your workplace. It can be thought of as just another management system, just like your quality control program, your ISO 9000 system or your inventory control system.

Think about how you manage workplace safety and health.

We can not tell you how to manage workplace safety and health in your business because that is your responsibility. Rather, we are asking you to think about how you manage workplace safety and health. Regardless of who you are, a small business owner, a division manager or supervisor on the shop floor – your role in managing workplace safety and health is an important one.

Link thinking with doing

We did not create this guide just to get you thinking. Just as you do not deliver products and services just by thinking about them you do not manage workplace safety and health just by thinking about it. We want you to think about how you can improve your safety and health program, then we want you to put your thoughts into practice. Linking thinking with doing makes your safety and health program even better than it is now.



Steps for Developing Successful Programs

What makes a workplace safety and health program successful?

Successful safety and health programs achieve and maintain safe, healthful workplaces. The key words are achieve and maintain. To achieve something, you make it a goal and work to accomplish it. Then, once you accomplish the goal, you work to maintain it. If you are a business owner or manager, this wisdom comes as no surprise – that is what you do to stay in business.

Steps of successful programs

Look at any business that has a safe, healthful workplace and you will find that they have taken the following seven steps to develop a successful injury prevention program:

- Managers are committed to making the program work.
- Employees are held accountable for following safe work practices.
- Employees are involved in the program.
- Employees know how to identify and control hazards.
- Employees know how to investigate near-miss incidents and accidents.
- Employees and managers are educated and trained in safe work practices.
- Managers review the program regularly.

These seven steps together make workplace safety and health programs successful. We call them steps, but we could have called them elements, components, ingredients or puzzle pieces. When you put them all together – in the right way – you have achieved a successful program.

Achieving a successful program

Your program may have some strong elements and some that need strengthening. You achieve a successful program by maintaining the strong ones and improving the weaker ones. The following section takes a closer look at these seven steps. It describes them and demonstrates how they contribute to a successful program.



The Steps of successful programs

Step 1 - Management Commitment

A successful workplace safety and health program achieves and maintains a safe, healthful workplace. To accomplish this goal, you will need to demonstrate your commitment to safety and health with as much energy as you would to any other important part of your business. What you say is important, but what you do is critical to your program's success. Showing a commitment to a safe, healthful workplace links what you say with what you do.

You can show your commitment in many ways. Here are four examples:

- You have a written mission statement and policy that emphasize the importance you place on workplace safety and health.
- You want to know why accidents happen.
- You read the minutes of safety committee meetings and act on the committee's recommendations.
- You make sure employees follow safe work procedures – and you follow them too.



Step 2 - Being accountable (Management and Employees)

Accountability links responsibilities to consequences. As a business owner or manager, you are responsible for making your business a successful one. "Passing the buck" is not an option. When Harry Truman said, "The buck stops here", he meant that he was responsible for his decisions and he accepted the consequences that followed them.

Accountability also helps your employees understand that you are committed to achieving and maintaining a safe, healthful workplace. It reinforces the importance of the program and ensures that when it comes to working safely, no one can "pass the buck".



Here are five ways to strengthen accountability:

- Employees' written job descriptions clearly state their safety and health responsibilities.
- Employees have enough authority, education and training to accomplish their responsibilities.
- Employees are praised for jobs well done.
- Monitor and enforce work safety rules - Supervisors are the key!
- Employees who behave in ways that could harm them or others are appropriately disciplined. The keys to appropriate discipline: be sincere, do not threaten, and have no hidden agendas.

Step 3 - Employee Involvement

Effective safety and health programs involve employees who have a stake in the program's success. One of the best ways to involve employees is through a safety committee: a group of employees – representing labor and management – that is responsible for promoting workplace safety and health.

Employees can volunteer to be part of the committee or their peers can elect them.



The following are examples of employee involvement in your safety and health program:

- You promote the program and employees know that you are committed to a safe, healthful workplace.
- Employees help you review and improve the program.
- Employees take safety education and training classes. They can identify hazards and suggest how to eliminate or control them.
- Employees volunteer to participate on the safety committee.

Step 4 - Identifying and controlling hazards

Before you can control hazards, you need to identify where they are. There are many ways to identify hazards. If your business is a small one, you may be able to walk around the workplace and look for them. On the other hand, if you work in a large manufacturing plant – say you are the safety director – you may need to do a comprehensive workplace survey.

Common ways of controlling hazards include engineering and administrative controls. The engineering approach eliminates hazards by using appropriate tools and equipment and by designing work processes that are hazard-free. Administrative controls, on the other hand, do not eliminate hazards. Rather, they reduce exposure by changing work practices. Examples include rotating workers among jobs, encouraging or allowing exercise programs, enforcing or requiring periodic rest breaks and making work procedures less stressful.



Personal protective equipment offers a third way to protect workers from hazards, but it does not control hazards; it acts as a barrier against them. Today's personal protective equipment is "hazard-specific." Before you invest in personal protective equipment, know the hazards it protects against. Be sure that it fits and is acceptable to those who will use it. Always train employees how to wear, use and maintain personal protective equipment.



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Successful programs identify and control workplace hazards in the following ways:

- Employees report hazards to a supervisor or safety committee member. You respond to their concerns.
- Employees keep tools and equipment working properly; they follow periodic maintenance schedules and safe work procedures.
- You have planned and prepared for emergencies. Employees know what to do when something goes wrong.
- You respond promptly to employee concerns about workplace hazards.
- If necessary, eliminate or control workplace hazards promptly with engineering or administrative controls and with personal protective equipment.

Step 5 - Investigating incidents and accidents

Despite your best efforts, you may not be able to prevent all workplace accidents and near miss incidents. Many accidents and near-miss incidents have preventable, but underlying, causes, some examples include un-enforced policies, lack of supervision and inadequate training.

By investigating all accidents and near-miss incidents, you reduce the chance that they'll happen again.



Here are two ways to strengthen accident and incident investigations:

- Find out the underlying causes of accidents and near-miss incidents.
- Involve your safety committee in investigating the causes of accidents and near-miss incidents.

Step 6 - Education and training

Your employees need to know about the workplace hazards to which they may be exposed, how to recognize the hazards and how to control their exposure. The best way for them to gain this knowledge is through education and training.

Why education and training? Education teaches why safe practices and procedures are important; education affects attitudes about safety and attitudes affect behavior. Then, training will improve skills necessary for working safely.

Employees should know safety and health rules, worksite hazards, safe work procedures and what to do in emergencies. New-employee orientations, periodic safety and health training and emergency drills build this knowledge. Supervisors and managers also need education and training: education to help them in their leadership roles and training to enhance their skills in identifying and controlling hazards.

Here are three examples that demonstrate you have educated and trained your employees about the importance of workplace safety and health:



- Employees know what workplace hazards could harm them.
- Employees know how to control or eliminate their exposure to hazards.
- Everyone – employees, supervisors and managers – understand their safety and health responsibilities.

Step 7 - Reviewing and evaluating

At least once a year, take time to review your program's strengths and weaknesses. You might want to begin by gathering the information that will help you accomplish the review.

Review the past year's accident reports. Were the investigations thorough? Did they identify hazards and recommend how to control or eliminate them? Have you acted on the recommendations? Do workers need more education or training to enhance their knowledge and skills in these areas?



Listen to others. For example, ask employees about the hazards to which they are exposed. Are they controlling them properly and reporting new ones? Ask supervisors how they enforce safe work practices. Do they recognize jobs well done and know how to correct unsafe practices?

Review your role in the program. The program reflects how you manage workplace safety and health. If you are committed to a safe, healthful workplace, your employees will be too.

How do you know your program is a successful one? Here are three examples:

- You take time, periodically, to review your program's strengths and weaknesses.
- You think about which elements make the program strong and which ones you need to build upon to make the program stronger.
- You ask others – employees, supervisors, and managers – for information about the program's strengths and weaknesses. You address their concerns.



Getting your program recognized

An effective safety and health program is an investment in your employees' safety and health and your bottom line. If you are developing a successful safety and health program, or if you have achieved one, here are two ways to earn recognition.

Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program (SHARP)

The SHARP program recognizes and rewards employers who have developed and implemented successful safety and health programs. You are eligible to participate if your organization has been in business for at least one year and has a lost-workday-cases incident rate that is less than the statewide average for its industry.

For more information on the SHARP program, call

Project Work**SAFE** at 802-828-6991 or toll free 888-723-3937 or visit our website <http://www.state.vt.us/labind/projectws/sharp.htm>

Voluntary Protection Program (VPP)

VPP is a nationwide program that recognizes employers who have applied the seven steps (See Pages 4-8) to achieve successful safety and health programs. You are eligible to participate if your organization meets the following criteria:

- Has a safety committee
- Has a successful safety and health program
- Has a three-year-average-total-cases incident rate that is less than the statewide average for its industry



For more information on VPP in Vermont please contact Dan Whipple at 802-334-4367.

Cost Saving Tips for Employers from the Vermont Workers' Compensation Division

For each \$1.00 spent on workplace safety – \$3.00 to \$10.00 are saved.

Enhancing workplace safety is the primary means for an employer to reduce injuries, illnesses and costs. Employers often feel that they care about workplace safety, but true workplace safety requires time, attention and resources. The following tips can help an employer become more familiar with and proactive in workplace safety. These target areas offer a workplace safety start for any employer:

Guidelines. In order to develop and maintain a safe workplace you need a blueprint or plan of action for everyone to follow including management, workers, safety and HR personnel. Your plan of action may include a safety handbook: training protocol, safety committee, procedures, reporting procedures for hazards and for injuries, safety checklists and more! The effort you put into developing, implementing and enforcing your safety protocol and guidelines will yield a safer workplace.

A worker's failure to follow a safety procedure or use safety equipment can result in denial of their claim.

Report. An employer must promptly report all work injuries that result in either an absence from work or require medical attention. Employers are good at reporting the injuries they are aware of promptly. Claim reporting to the department, however, confirms that many employees are not informed of when, how and whom to report an injury. Employers must educate workers to report all injuries. An employer should also train one or more personnel to oversee workers' compensation and injury reporting to ensure timely, accurate and informed action with regard to an injury claim.

Delayed reporting is a significant factor in claim disputes, litigation and unnecessary costs.

Talk. Safety is not a secret. Workplace safety should be discussed all the time, at all staff meetings, management meetings, hiring interviews, orientations, performance reviews, retreats and virtually at every opportunity that arises. A particularly safety conscious employer will review safety every day and/or at every work site, whenever the opportunity presents. Safety needs to become a core value in every workplace and the way to ensure this is to talk about it as if it is a fundamental part of your workplace.

Treat workers' comp like it impacts your profit, your payroll, your staff level and productivity – because it does.

Target. Every business and each employer is unique. Your industry, your business and your worksite present unique hazards. Your First Reports of Injury (FROI) documents your historical injuries. You should become familiar with your specific hazards or weaknesses and target them for more safety action. If you have a history of repetitive lifting injuries you should provide more training, equipment or staff to minimize the burden. Similarly, if your FROI indicates eye injuries you may be overlooking safety glasses or training and enforcement on their use. Take action to limit or correct each weakness you identify. New and young workers, as well as hazardous employment all require extra safety training and attention.

40% of work injuries occur to workers who have been in their jobs for six months or less.

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Return to Work. Returning the injured worker to safe suitable work is a primary goal after an injury. The work injury often imposes physical limitations on the injured worker. It is in everyone's best interest for the employer to be informed of the worker's specific functional abilities and to provide modified or transitional work for the worker to return in a limited or part time capacity. The workplace offers financial, social and psychological benefits to the injured worker that cannot be replaced by disability at home. Similarly, workers who see their employers applying time and effort to transitional work restructuring know that they are valued and often respond with an improved outlook and greater productivity.

Studies confirm that the longer a worker is out of work, the less likely it is they will return to work at all.

The very safest of employers take a renewed look at safety all the time. They ask themselves:

“What else can I do in workplace safety?”

“Can I do more to prevent injuries?”

“What can we do to prevent this injury from happening again?”

Become a better employer by taking some additional steps in the area of workplace safety. It will help to protect your workers and add value to your business.

Workers' Compensation Questions?

Call the Workers' Compensation Division of the
VT Dept. of Labor and Industry at: 802-828-2286

On the web at: www.state.vt.us/labind/weindex.htm

FIRST REPORT OF INJURY - FORM 1 (Approved for use as OSHA 101 and 301)

PDF: www.state.vt.us/labind/weforms/Form01.pdf

WORD 8: www.state.vt.us/labind/weforms/Form01.doc

Getting help

You can get useful advice on improving your safety and health program from many sources, including your insurance carrier, Project WorkSAFE, labor and trade organizations, equipment manufacturers, commercial consultants and vendors.

Project WorkSAFE – Business Assistance

Project WorkSAFE offers a wide variety of free safety-and-health services to employers

Consultation Services

- Offers on-site safety and health assistance **at no cost** to help Vermont employers recognize and correct safety and health problems in their workplaces.
- Provides consultations in the areas of safety, industrial hygiene, ergonomics, Occupational Safety & Health Programs, new-business assistance, the Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program (SHARP)
- Offers Air (Chemical) and Noise exposure monitoring

Standards & Technical Resources

- Develops, interprets and provides technical advice on safety and health standards.
- Publishes booklets, pamphlets and other materials to assist in the implementation of safety and health standards and programs.
- Conducts conferences, seminars, workshops and rule forums.

Public Education & Conferences

- Coordinates and provides technical training on various topics such as confined space, ergonomics, lockout/tagout and excavations.
- Provides workshops covering basic safety-and-health program management, safety committees, accident investigation and job-safety analysis.

Partnership in Safety

- Free safety and health half-day training seminars, held quarterly in Waterbury at the Green Mountain Coffee Roasters facility in conjunction with the Vermont Small Business Development Center.
- Information at <http://www.state.vt.us/labind/projectws/partnership.htm>

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For more information, call the Project Work**SAFE** office nearest you.

Main Office: National Life Building, 2nd Floor North

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<http://www.state.vt.us/labind/projectws.htm>

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Your insurance carrier

A place to start is with your workers' compensation insurance carrier. In addition to assisting you with your safety and health program, your carrier may provide you, at no cost, the following services:

- On-site safety and health evaluations including air sampling and noise monitoring
- Loss-prevention services
- Assistance in identifying and controlling workplace hazards
- Ergonomic evaluations

Contact your insurance carrier to request a consultation.

Trade associations

Many trade and employer associations emphasize workplace safety and health as a member service. If you are a member, ask the association how it can help you.

Equipment manufacturers

Equipment manufacturers want their products to be used safely. They are usually willing to offer advice on products that will fit within the objectives of your safety and health program.

Labor organizations

If your employees belong to a union, work with union representatives to help you identify and control workplace hazards.

Commercial consultants and vendors

Check the listings in your telephone directory for firms that sell safety services and products. Consultants charge for their services, but they also do much of the time-consuming work; typical services include developing and evaluating safety and health programs. Vendors can give you useful information on products they sell that will fit within the budget of your safety and health program.



Vermont Department of Labor & Industry
Vermont's Occupational Safety &
Health Administration (VOSHA)

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