

## HEALTH AND SAFETY —

# Strategy First

BY LIZ R SCOTT

**H**ealth and safety is an integral part of business, and without clear and appropriate health and safety programs employees may become needlessly injured. In leading companies safety has always been an unquestioned priority. It has taken years, even decades and perhaps hundreds of needless injuries, for other companies to move health and safety to a recognized level of importance in the organization. Depending on the industry, safety is still often treated as a burden and a cost to the company. But when you consider the recent legislative changes to the Criminal Code that increase senior management accountabilities for health and safety, positive attention to this area has grown. When senior management are the ones responsible for the health and safety and understand the significant consequences of not having a solid safety program in place they start to understand a safety program can bring significant value.

A few key management strategies can ensure that health and safety is observed in the workplace including:

- Health and Safety Vision and Passion
- Measurable Goals
- Standard Operating Procedures
- Dedicated Health and Safety Committee

## HEALTH AND SAFETY VISION AND PASSION

The first most important step for an organization is to have a safety culture — make it a passion to do the job the safe way. As discussed in Harder & Scott (2005), management makes a conscious decision about accept-

ed behaviours and policies surrounding their business operation. When health and safety is perceived as a value in the organization it is amazing how everyone knows and performs work using the safe methods. As discussed in Stewart (2002), the model for managing outstanding safety includes a framework, the values and the practices. The importance of health and safety must be part of the corporation's belief system.

ILO-OSH 2001 specifies a successful management system will be built on a continual improvement cycle including these elements: Policy, Organizing, Planning and Implementing, Evaluation and Action for Improvement.

## MEASURABLE GOALS

Health and safety should be an integral part of managers and employees' annual review with measurable outcomes and action plans to close any gaps. Stone & Meltz (1993) discuss the importance of incorporating health and safety aspects into performance reviews. Most of us undergo annual reviews and are required to set and meet objectives; it's not a foreign concept to extend it to health and safety. As discussed by the IAPA (2003), "Each person in a company, no matter what his or her function, has some responsibility for health and safety. Assign responsibilities, set these out in writing to ensure that they are understood, and hold the appropriate persons accountable."

It is particularly important to incorporate health and safety into the goals and objectives when you consider the impact health and safety can have on an organization. Regular updates on progress toward the established goals are essential. If the goal is set but not

Without clear and appropriate health

reviewed regularly, the importance is minimized. When you ask safety professionals, supervisors and employees, they almost always pick production as the function that commands the most support. Therefore, it is essential that health and safety be built into the Standard Operating Procedures of the organization.

If the workplace has regular meetings health and safety should be a component of those meetings. No meeting should be held without a mention of the importance of health and safety in the organization. If concerns are identified that are preventing the accomplishment of the health and safety goals it is important to ensure that health and safety concerns are dealt with promptly and in a manner that will improve the health and safety in the workplace.

Realistic goals should be established on a regular basis for safety performance as part of the management system. There are pitfalls to watch out in establishing these goals, such as setting unachievable goals. For example, vowing to reduce an injury rate by 100 per cent is likely unrealistic and not something you can really control. However, delivering employee training is something you can monitor and measure — you either do it or you don't.

## STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

Many organizations have standard operating procedures for the performance of specific jobs. The standard operating procedures should incorporate health and safety aspects into the descriptions. This immediately conveys the importance of the health and safety element into the execution of the task. Employees should be adequately trained on the health and safety aspects of all jobs.

Employee health and safety are integral to productivity. A management system that integrates health and safety activities into all aspects of the company's operations will help achieve positive results in productivity, quality and, above all, the health and safety of employees (IAPA, 2003).

# Recent changes to the Criminal Code increase senior management accountability for health and safety.

By constantly developing and measuring safety skills, an organization can begin to reach a point where it can avoid hazards, limit risk when the system is broken or stressed, and encourage reporting when an unsafe condition exist. Stewart (2002), suggests that job analysis can help identify hazards and should be explored for elimination of that element of the job. Repetition of the communication of safe procedures is one of the methods of ensuring the work is performed in a safe manner.

## DEDICATED HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

The utilization of the health and safety committee to formulate plans and demonstrate how initiatives are progressing is an essential element. The health and safety data can be communicated frequently to the workforce to keep health and safety in the forefront of everyone's mind.

When issues are identified it is important that the health and safety committee function in a manner to identify the solutions. The committee is not in place to complain about health and safety conditions or try to point fingers at why accidents are occurring, they should be a functional team that seeks solutions to identified concerns.

The committee has a particularly difficult job once the easy items are fixed. In order to have a positive impact on safety they must perform root cause analysis on all accidents, develop improvement ideas, and implement the solutions.

## CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the health and safety of workers is a key focus area in corporations as it is the employees who assist the corporations in the achievement of their business objectives. No company willingly wants an employee injured and the adoption of a strong vision, measurable goals, standard operating procedures and a dedicated health and safety committee will assist in the quest of an injury free workplace.

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**Liz R. Scott, PhD**

(lscott@orgsoln.com) is Principal of Organizational Solutions a firm that assists employers in their health, safety and disability management needs. She is recognized for award winning cost reduction results, "best practice" program designs, and the ability to solve a complex variety of organizational health, safety and disability concerns. Her unique background successfully combines knowledge gained as a health care professional and as an executive in a variety of industries including consulting, consumer goods, automotive and public sector. Her education includes a PhD in Psychology, a Master of Engineering, an MBA, a Master of Science and Certification in Nursing, Safety Management, and Disability Management.

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