A SAFE INVESTMENT

BY LIZ SCOTT

How does your workplace health and safety strategy stack up?

It has taken years, even decades, for organizations to make health and safety a high-level priority. Depending on the industry, safety is still treated as a cost to the business—an expensive burden that most employers don't want to think about. Safety often doesn't become a priority until someone gets hurt.

But legislative changes—specifically, Bill C45 introduced in 2004—have increased senior management accountabilities for health and safety, so attitudes must change. When you are responsible for health and safety in your company and understand the consequences of not having a formal program in place, the need for a solid strategy becomes obvious. Without a dedicated safety program, employees can be needlessly injured and productivity can suffer. Here are four proven management strategies that can transform any workplace into a safe, healthy environment.

1 Make it a value: The most important step for any organization is to incorporate health and safety into the culture of the company. Employers who are passionate about keeping their workers safe on the job are often the ones who see results. When health and safety is a core value, it shows in everyone's performance.

2 Set measurable goals: Health and safety should be an integral part of annual employee performance reviews. These reviews should include measurable goals and action plans to close any gaps. Most of us who undergo annual employee reviews are required to set and meet job-related objectives. Employers should include health and safety objectives in those reviews. Regular progress reports are also essential. If a goal is set but not reviewed, it's useless. Organizations should also be careful not to set unachievable goals. Wanting to reduce the rate of injury by 10 per cent is nice, but it's not something employers can control. Providing adequate safety training, however, is something organizations can monitor and measure.

3 Incorporate safety into SOPs: Many organizations have standard operating procedures (SOPs) for certain jobs. These procedures should include health and safety steps. By doing so, the importance of health and safety is immediately conveyed. Employees should receive the necessary safety training to do their jobs properly. By continually developing and measuring the safety skills of employees, organizations can reach a point where they avoid hazards, limit risk when systems are broken or stressed, and encourage the reporting of unsafe working conditions.

4 Form a committee: Organizations can form health and safety committees to formulate plans and keep abreast of how various safety initiatives and processes are working out. These committees are responsible for identifying solutions when safety issues arise. Health and safety committees often perform root-cause analysis on accidents, develop safety strategies and solutions, and oversee their implementation.

The health and safety of workers must become a key concern for employers because, as we all know, employees are an organization's most valuable resource. Adopting a strong health and safety vision, setting measurable goals, incorporating safety practices into standard operating procedures and having a dedicated health and safety committee in place will assist companies in their quest for injury-free workplaces. **CHM**

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