

Keys to an effective safety accountability system

Accountability is a critical component of an effective safety management system. In fact, if employees don't believe they're going to be held accountable (experience consequences) for the decisions they make related to safety, you can be sure that any safety effort is "ultimately doomed to failure," Oregon OSHA points out.

Below are some keys to making your safety accountability system effective:

1. Establish formal standards of performance. If standards of acceptable behavior and performance are not established and clearly communicated to employees, an effective accountability system is impossible. Company policies, procedures, job descriptions, and rules are needed to clearly convey standards of performance in safety and health to employees. It is important to understand that if progressive discipline policies and procedures are used, they should be clearly stated in writing and made available to everyone. In fact, it is a good idea to have all employees read and sign a statement that they read, understand, and will comply with safety procedures when they are hired, and annually thereafter.

2. Provide resources to meet the standards of performance. To be justified in administering discipline, management should first provide employees with the means and methods to achieve the standards of performance that have been established. This includes such things as ensuring safe and healthful conditions, providing safe tools, equipment, and training; and establishing reasonable work schedules.

3. Implement a measuring system. When employees are held accountable for meeting safety standards set by the company, the quality or level of that safety performance should be measured some way. Measurement strategies can include: (1) Informal daily observations. (2) Periodic formal evaluations.

4. Apply consequences. Without an expectation of effective consequences, accountability is not believable and has no credibility. No consequences...no accountability. Consequences need to be appropriate as well as effective.

5. Evaluate the accountability system. The process usually involves three levels of activity:

(1) Identification. Inspect the accountability system policies, plans, processes, and procedures to identify what exists.

(2) Analysis. Dissect and thoroughly study each accountability system policy, plan, process, and procedure to understand what they look like. The devil is in the detail.

(3) Evaluation. Compare and contrast each accountability system policy, plan, process and procedure against benchmarks and best practices to judge their effectiveness.