

## **Should my entity develop a safety incentive program?**

NO – If an incentive program will be the foundation or a large part of your safety plan.

YES – If you are committed to safety and the incentive program will be a small part of your overall safety plan.

### **Safety incentives PROs:**

Safety incentive programs have been shown to be effective in helping organizations reduce their employee accidents and injuries. They help give recognition to employees that have accomplished safety goals. They help promote safety awareness and compliance to safety rules or procedures. They help let employees know that the entity values safety.

### **Safety incentives CONs:**

You cannot buy safety. Incentive programs smack of manipulation and trivialize safety by turning it into a game or lottery. They encourage workers not to report injuries. If an employee won't wear safety glasses to prevent being blind - for life, then a promise of a \$50 jacket at the end of the year won't motivate either.

*"I was so frightened that I was going to spoil the record of 400 days that you can't imagine"*

*"Nobody wants to be the one to spoil the record"*

*"I think that if somebody spoils the record or gets hurt, he'll get buried in concrete so nobody will ever find out about it and they won't lose the record"*

It is my opinion safety incentive programs can be beneficial to all entities willing to develop and implement a good program. Incentive programs may vary greatly in size, scope and structure. They **MUST** be customized to the organization's specific needs based on operations, problems, goals, culture etc. To help in your safety efforts - I have developed my top ten provisions of a good safety incentive program:

### **Call it a Safety Recognition Program**

People do not need incentives to behave safely. Self-preservation, humanitarian concerns, and sense of duty should be enough. Everyone needs and wants to be recognized. In opinion surveys, praise and recognition for a job well done come out ahead of salary or money on a list of what motivates employees. Don't try to buy safe behavior – expect it and **recognize** those that deliver.

#### **1. Make it Only a Subpart of the Overall Safety Plan**

Safety recognition programs may be a great decoration but a poor foundation. If the recognition is used to cause safe behavior without goals and all the base elements of a safety plan it will fail.

Like the house build on the sand when the rains (workplace hazards & OSHA) come the program washes away. The basic elements of a safety plan include:

- Management Support,
- Accountable Administration,
- Hazard Identification & Control,
- Training, Accident Investigation,
- Inspections,
- Public Safety,
- Fleet Safety,
- Property Loss Control, and
- Periodic Audits.

In California, Title 8, Section 3203 requires that all employers develop a written and *effective* Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP). Required policy and procedures elements are:

- Assignment of Responsibility
- Program Enforcement
- Safety Communication
- New Hire Safety Training
- Accident Investigation
- Ongoing Safety Training
- Record Keeping and Reporting
- Hazard Assessment, Control, and Correction

### **3. Include Both Behaviors and Results**

Most recognition programs concentrate on either results (less injuries) or behaviors (more use of seat-belts) but seldom do they include both. Both are important and need to be part of the program. If only results were measured and recognized, then employees who ignore safety rules may receive awards just by being lucky. We also know compliance to safety behaviors - work rules (i.e. OSHA) does not necessarily mean there won't be accidents. In general individuals should be recognized for behaviors and groups for results.

### **4. Keep it Simple**

If you need a lawyer to understand the program – most of the motivation evaporates. The fact that many potential tax breaks go unused by most Americans demonstrates this point. The cost to administer a simple program will be much less than the costs of a complicated program and success is more likely.

### **5. Base the Program on Clear Goals**

Everyone needs to know what the objectives are. Again these goals should reflect both results and behaviors. One goal may be to reduce the accident/incident rate by 20%. This result-based goal can be easily understood and measured.

Improvement of the average safety inspection score by 20% would be a behavior type goal. This also is easy to understand and to measure.

## **6. Address the Incentive to - Not Report Accidents**

Many critics of recognition programs cite the incentive of employees not to report injuries. The safety plan should include serious consequences to employees that don't promptly report all accidents. It may be helpful to offer an award for developing action plans to prevent future similar accidents as part of all accident investigations.

## **7. Keep it Fresh**

Safety awareness over a period of time will lead to a better accident record, and that leads to: less pain and suffering, a more productive work force, and lower costs. One of the purposes of a recognition program is to increase safety awareness. The program must stay fresh and change periodically. A program setup with a specific start and finish (i.e. 12 months) will force both review and renewal.

## **8. Right Awards**

Some claim the only reward everyone understands is cash. It is true "dollars" are appreciated by all; other rewards may have what is called the "trophy effect." A simple reward of a nice cooler will remind the recipient each time the cooler is used of the safety program and the recognition received. Regardless of the company's prize philosophy, the awards should have *real value* and be awarded in *grand fashion*. The recognition is part of the prize.

## **9. Top Management "Cheerleaders"**

Safety experts tend to agree the best and safest organizations have succeeded in developing a company-wide culture of safety. The recognition program can be one of the most effective methods of culture development – if top management fully and openly supports the program. The physical award (cash or other prize) will be less memorable than the public pat on the back from the organization's leader.

## **10. Balance Group & Individual**

Our society consists of individuals who are all members of several groups. We all accomplish things both individually and as teams. Having some awards for individuals and some for teams will tap into self-motivation and positive peer pressure.